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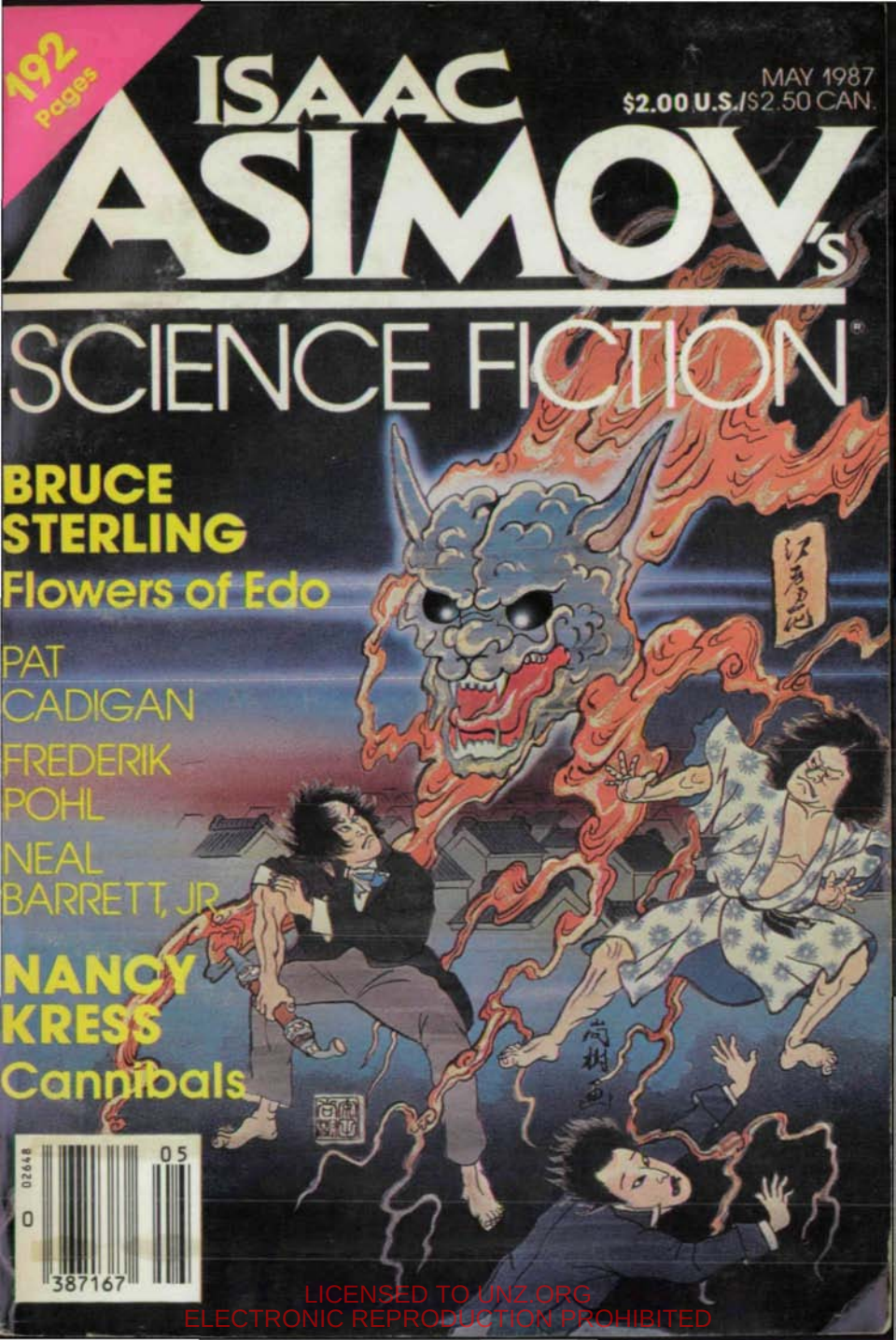

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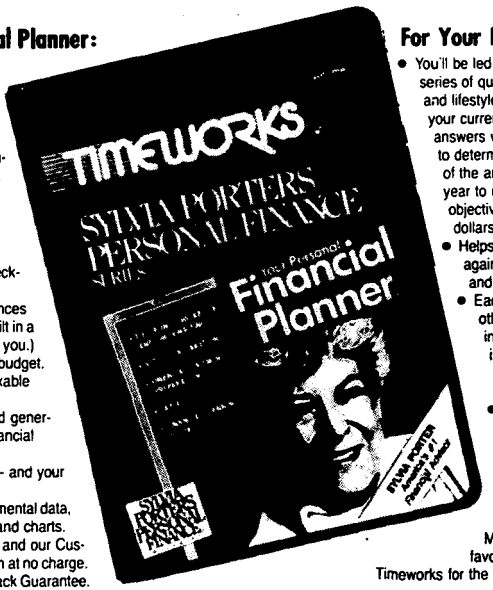

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

SPACE FLIGHT

Virtually all my life I dreamed of space flight. That is natural, I suppose, for anyone who began to read science fiction, as I did, at a very early age.

The first story I published, "Marooned off Vesta" (*Amazing Stories,* March 1939), dealt with space-flight. It even dealt with a space disaster, for it opens with a spaceship that has been wrecked while crossing the asteroid belt, and has only three of its complement of crew and passengers left alive.

Since then, while many of my stories have *not* involved space-flight, many have; and so have almost all my novels.

It is not surprising, then, that to me the day of October 4, 1957, when the first human-made object was placed in orbit, was one of triumphant delight. Unlike most Americans, I didn't care one bit that it was the Soviets that did it. They, like us, were human beings and I considered it a human achievement, not a national one. Besides, I believed from the start (and still do) that before space can truly be made part of human life, the entire project must be made global.

Nevertheless, while I was impatient with the Soviet-American "race" to the Moon (I wanted co-operation), I realized that it had to be so. I told myself that Congress wouldn't have appropriated one penny for something as blue-sky (literally) as space flight, if they weren't so anxious to do the Soviets in the eye.

So in 1969, we reached the Moon, and continued reaching it again on six more occasions. Again, I was disappointed that that seemed to satisfy us and that we didn't make plans to *stay* on the Moon, to build a mining station there, but I told myself it was a matter of one step at a time.

Since then we have explored the Solar system with uncrewed probes, and we have stayed in space for longer and longer intervals and, finally, the United States developed a shuttle. It took far longer than was planned, was far more expensive, and didn't accomplish what was promised, but there were twenty-four flights that seemed to accomplish *something,* and I praised it enthusiastically as a necessary step toward building a space-station and then using that as

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a base for establishing a mining station on the Moon and building all sorts of structures in space.

I grew rather nervous as the space program became more and more the darling of the conservatives. It seemed to me that conservatives liked all sorts of things that I didn't like; such as Joseph McCarthy, Richard Nixon, the Vietnam folly, nuclear arms, "covert" wars, and so on. If they liked the space program, what was *I* doing liking it? —But I told myself not to respond in knee-jerk fashion. If the conservatives came out for washing, I was not going to come out for dirt. So I continued to support the space program even though I felt a little creepy about the company I was keeping.

And then the military involved itself more and more in the space program and it seemed to me that, more and more, space was becoming a new war arena, rather than a place for peaceful human expansion and technological advance. But still I told myself that if that was what it took to get strong governmental support, we should take the money, and hope that the global imperative for continued space exploration on a peaceful basis might wipe away the military aspect eventually.

When the *Challenger* exploded, I was as devastated as all of us were, and spoke up strongly in interviews in the press, on radio, and on television, for continuing space exploration with crewed space vessels. I even argued on this point

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against Carl Sagan, with whom I'd never previously disagreed on any matter. And I contributed money to a large advertisement in the New York *Times*, urging that a new shuttle be built to replace the *Challenger*.

But then, yesterday, I read a book that was about to be published by Doubleday and Company. It's author is Malcolm McConnell and the title is *Challenger: A Major Malfunction*. The term "major malfunction" is one of the euphemisms for what happened to the *Challenger* but it can clearly be applied to the entire Shuttle project, as the book makes plain. On the cover of the book is the following description of its contents in large print: "A True Story of Politics, Greed, and the Wrong Stuff."

I read the book at a sitting, never closing it after I had opened it, and I must tell you I found it as devastating as the *Challenger* catastrophe itself.

I'm not going to discuss the book in detail; I would like to have you all read it for yourself; but let me tell you just a few things that upset me.

I read about presidents who made important decisions in connection with the space program (including the one about the teacher-in-space idea) that were based entirely on how it would affect their re-election. I read about senators whose chief concern was to get their own states on the gravy train (after all, it is the state that elects them, not the nation as a whole).

You might say, "Oh, well—politicians!" However, that's not all. I read about NASA functionaries, taken from some industrial firm, who showed more loyalty to their firm than to the space program. I read about others who made dubious decisions because their first priority was to do that which would please the president or some congressman and insure grants. I read about others who felt the important thing was to maintain NASA "prestige" by promising what could not be delivered; and who made sure that there would be no hitches or uncertainties by forbidding their underlings to as much as *mention* any possibility of hitches or uncertainties. (That's the old rule that if you don't talk about something, it doesn't exist.) And I read about underlings who went along with this because they had their jobs and bonuses to consider.

I read about a senator and a congressman, who upset the NASA schedule by insisting on junketing on shuttle flights, and of a NASA leadership lacking guts to forbid it because it might endanger the grants. I read about the fact that the fatal *Challenger* mission was prematurely scrubbed on Saturday night because there was a chance the vice-president (the *vice*-president, for goodness sake) might be somewhat inconvenienced if they did not. I read that the *Challenger* was then sent up on the following Tuesday with the temperature about twenty degrees below what

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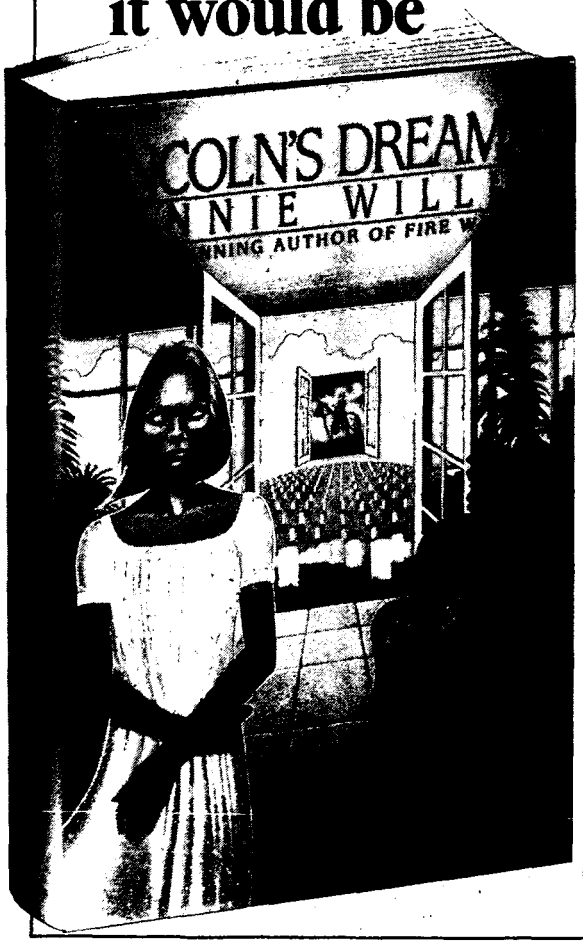

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NASA's own rules considered the minimum feasible reading, because any further delay would spoil the next launching. That next launching, you see, was designed to take an unheralded look at Comet Halley and make the Soviets look foolish.

By the time I had finished the book I was totally disillusioned, not with the abstract concept of space flight, but with the people who are running it, politicians, industrialists, and administrators alike.

What to do? I still want spaceflight. I still want an extension of the human range. I still want to see a mining station on the moon, solar power stations in orbit, an industrial plant lifted several thousand miles above the atmosphere, together with laboratories, observatories, and large space settlements. I want all of that.

But I want it, somehow, out of range of political self-seeking, of nationalistic in-fighting, of personal aggrandizement. Is there anyone out there who will fight for a glorious global vision of the future of humanity—for the sake of the vision and of humanity and of nothing other than that?

If there isn't; if I am just another fuzzy-minded idealist; if I don't understand hard-headed, practical affairs, then let me point out this—

The government is pushing its "Star Wars" notion. "Star Wars" is many times more complicated than the Shuttle ever was. It is far more expensive. It will take far more time. It has a far more grandiose aim in view.

And can it be that the same kind of self-seeking politicians, industrialists, and administrators, are running that show, too?

Are those involved with "Star Wars" intent on doing first what will please a president who obviously has his aged heart and mind set upon it, and will not listen (we know) to anything he doesn't want to hear? Will they tell him only what he wants to hear.

The appropriations involved are huge. Will congressmen labor to make sure that the money spigot is turned on over their own state or their own district and ask no questions beyond that? Will administrators worry first about the profits that might be made by the firms they used to work for before they took the job, or the firms they plan to work for after they leave the job? Will mistakes be covered up? Will decisions be based for self-aggrandizement? In short, will it be the shuttle program all over again?

Well, the shuttle program cost us a few tens of millions of dollars, and seven heroic lives.

Run the same way, the "Star Wars" program will cost us hundreds of billion dollars even in the dubious case that it is not an entire flop, and it may cost us world civilization, if we behave as though we think it will work when it won't.

I think about Vietnam and Watergate and wonder: For heaven's sake, is there any way we can *learn* from our disasters?●

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LETTERS

To The Editor:

Re "Strange Eruptions" by Harry Turtledove aka Eric G. Iverson, *IAsfm* Aug. '86, p. 102:

I have an interest in history, but strangely, the more I learn of it, the less I know of it. I do know that all our histories are skimpy at best.

For instance, re vaccination, I have found only this—that it was devised in Constantinople or vicinity prior to the eighteenth century, but I have not found out when or by whom. The above author has it that it was devised circa AD 1300, if I have guessed Byzantine calendrics.

Inasmuch as Mr. Turtledove is said, in the foreword of the story, to have an academic background in Byzantine history, I assume he has documentation for his claim. Could the author give the actual name(s) of the discoverer(s) of vaccination and its date or approximate date on the Gregorian calendar? If you have room for publication, I think this info would be of interest to other persons of historical bent, as well as to myself.

The story was A-1 with me. Please tell Mr. Turtledove so, and ask him to write more.

Thank you.

George La Forest
610 S. 6th St.
Rockford, IL 61108

It wasn't vaccination that was invented by the Turks, but variolation, which is inoculation with smallpox virus. This sometimes gave you immunity without killing you, but it was very dangerous. Vaccination is inoculation with cowpox *virus, and this was invented by Edward Jenner in 1796. As to just when the Turks began to variolate, I don't know.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov and Staff:

I don't want much; I just want to say that I am pleased to have read in your March Letters column that you will not censor. I am very highly against censorship, and even the suggestion of it angers me. I am blind, and therefore depend upon the government to make available many Braille publications. Recently, Congress saw fit to censor what I would be allowed to receive, and nothing was done about it. I, therefore, am a victim of censorship which I cannot control. Censorship is not just a word for me.

Even though I did not care for "World War Last," I am glad you published it. It was not the sex in the story, per se, but the amount of it. However, I still want to see it and its ilk in print because there

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is someone out there who wishes to read it. Thank you for not censoring.

I also appreciate the need for the disclaimer I occasionally see in front of this or that piece. I, personally, do not feel the need to heed such warnings, but I am sure there are those for whom these warnings are very necessary.

Sincerely,

Jody Day
Covina, CA

The impulse to censor exists in every human mind. The smaller the mind, the stronger the impulse. This must be fought at every step and every moment.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor Asimov,

I remember several years ago I had the pleasure of reading *The Early Asimov*, Book One. Reading about the evolution of one of this century's greatest writers gave me much pleasure. I am referring not only to the stories themselves, but to your many meetings with the late John Campbell.

Why am I mentioning this?

Simple. You used to travel down to his office and submit stories right onto his desk. I can't do that. I live in Toronto. Every science fiction magazine that I read seems to be published in New York or California. Submitting stories onto desks from my point of view hardly seems economical. I, of course, considered the obvious—sending stuff by mail.

Shudder.

Dispatching anything through the wavering Canadian mail system scares the hell out of me. Mail has been lost in Canada Post at an astounding rate lately, so much so that several people that I am acquainted with now use couriers ($$). But what can I do? I can't afford couriers. Geez! I can barely afford sending this letter!

Isn't this terrible! Unfortunately, sending you stuff though the mail is the only realistic method.

Thus on August fifteenth, nineteen eighty-six, I awoke early and decided to send you a story.

Instantly another problem wormed its way into my meagre life:

Oh great master of science fiction, I have read all of the fine print in your magazine and I am thoroughly confused. How do I submit a story to you, oh great one?

Okay. It sounds silly. I've written you a letter, and you have obviously received it. Logic dictates that I could easily send you a finely written story in the same fashion. Right?

I'm not sure. (I've never done this before.)

So great master, please, please tell me how. Give me the secret key that will open that great door. Relate to me those mystic numbers and words and I promise to please you with great works of imagination.

With many thanks and expectations,

Mark Francis.
Richmond Hill, Ontario
Canada

On the contents page, my friend, in the small print at the bottom, it says "Address for all editorial mat-

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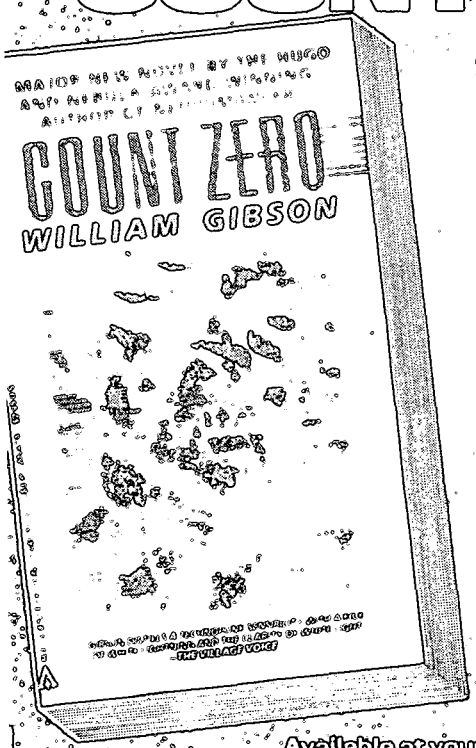

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ters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY, 10017." It also says "Gardner Dozois: Editor." You submit your stories to Gardner at the address given. On page five, under the masthead, you'll find information regarding our manuscript submission guidelines. Please send for these first. And don't worry about using the mails. Most successful writers never saw the editor they submitted to.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Dozois:

When I was young and naive, I thought that if I could combine the poetic insight of Ray Bradbury, the apocalyptic vision of John Brunner, the scientific realism of A.C. Clarke, the evocative aliens of Jack Vance, the unabashed romance of Anne McCaffrey, and the punnish wit of Keith Laumer—my books and stories would mesmerize millions. Now that I am older and wiser, I just want to be Connie Willis.

Sincerely,

Ruth Fredericks
Cambridge, MA

And concerning the sane rationality of Isaac Asimov, you say nothing?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Magazine Folks:

I have every copy of *IAsfm* ever published except for the very first copy. But I haven't read any of it for the past couple years.

Every time I pick up a copy and start to read I squint. Once upon a time the print was just a tad larger and a little easier to read.

No, I don't need glasses.

Surely you can't cram that much more in one issue by using smaller print. Is there an outside chance you can change it?

Sincerely,

Sheri Reynolds
Kingston Springs, TN

Yes, as a matter of fact, we do *manage to squeeze in a significant amount of additional material in this way. It's the high cost of paper that makes us try to give the reader as much for his money as possible without using additional paper.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov, Gardner Dozois, et al,

I am writing to congratulate you on printing Norman Spinrad's "Critical Standards" in the September *Asimov's*. It is probably true that the plea—clarion call even—sounded by Norman Spinrad is not a new or uncommon event, but this in no way detracts from its urgent significance.

Urgent? Why, yes—because of the huge volume of SF that is being published and read today, truckloads of which are vapid chewing-gum-for-the-mind nonsense. Criticism, I venture to suggest, is the most immediate method we possess for winnowing the avalanche of printed SF that is hitting the bookstands. If it is not being applied by the editors (or certain editors) then it is down to us, the ones who care in the SF community, to start hoisting the banners of excellence, quality and rationality.

As to the problem of the Trad.

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Establishment's ineffectiveness in dealing with SF, would this be solved, even partly, by SF writers of stature doing indepth critiques of SF works for the Trad publications? Or would this be self-defeating? And in any case, would such an occurrence be an admission by the Trad.Lit.Est. of their inability as far as SF goes?

This question of criticism is important, too important to just let slip and drift. It is time to state quite categorically that no criticism is destructive, since a work of criticism implies that the critic wants to see the object in a better form. Thus criticism can be considered seriously as a source of possible improvement, or politely discounted if it consists solely of raving rabid-rat dementia.

It is interesting that Norman mentioned *Foundation*, the UK critical review, and made the observation that it is "somewhat idiosyncratically British." I would hasten to point out that there is serious comment taking place in other British publications. For example, *Interzone*, the *Cassandra* anthology, and the BSFA's *Vector*. If we *seem* idiosyncratic it's probably due to our socio-cultural traditions, so don't be misled if you see those banners I mentioned starting to rise on this side of the Atlantic—they are rallying points for you as well as ourselves.

Yours Literally,

Mike Cobley
Glasgow, United Kingdom

You assume, of course, that critics know best. Maybe some do, but most are self-appointed and I am reluctant to accept their expertise.

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The other day, some speaker (a professional singer) mentioned that his wife was a music critic and said, "Can you imagine performing in the evening and then going to bed with a critic." Whereupon, from the audience, I called out, "You were only doing what I've wanted to do to critics for years," and brought the house down.

—Isaac Asimov

Dr. Asimov:

I must take exception to your seeming trivialization of the connection between word processors and an apparent increase in spelling errors, usage errors, et cetera.

While I agree with the point I think you were trying to make, that the concurrence of two events does not prove any connection between them, I do believe the connection between the increased errors and word processors exists.

Actually, though, I believe it is not word processors in general that are to blame, but the specialized programs known as spelling "checkers." I put quotes around "checkers" because these programs do not really check spelling. Rather, they compare each word in a given document to a list of correctly spelled English words, and flag each word in the document that isn't in the word list as a possible spelling error. The drawback is that errors in usage, such as using "their" instead of "there" or "it's" where "its" is correct, are *not* flagged, because both words may be found in the lists. And these kinds of errors, in grammer and usage, are exactly the kind that seem to be increasing of late.

Until someone can program a spelling checker with the rules of proper usage (which probably won't be until the attainment of the modern Holy Grail, Artificial Intelligence), spelling checkers can help an author or an editor, but are still no substitute for the time-honored skill of simple proof-reading.

Truly yours,

Charl Phillips

I don't recall trivializing any connection between word-processors and an increase *in errors. I didn't even know there was such a connection. My own use of a word-processor has* decreased *my errors although it has not reduced them to zero because I'm such a rotten proofreader. On the other hand, I don't make use of a computerized spelling checker and neither do the editors of this magazine.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Michael Swanwick's "Guide to the Postmoderns" in your August issue does a disservice to his readers by failing to give any mention to the superlative work of Orson Scott Card.

Ever since he entered the science fiction field with "Ender's Game" (1977), Card has been providing his readers with thoughtful and thought-provoking fiction featuring believably and humanely described people.

Card's writing is always literate and subtle, with new ideas and superb story-development; it is also inventive, perceptive, and witty —all of the traits Swanwick ascribes to the "humanist" writers.

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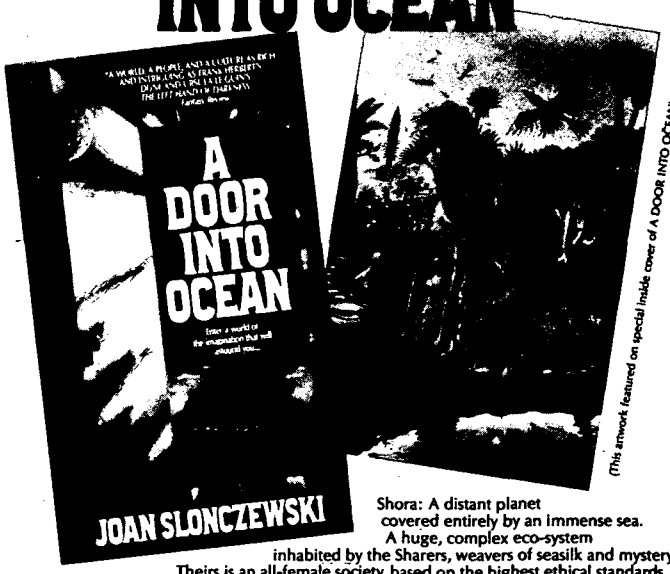
Analog Magazine

JOAN SLONCZEWSKI

A DOOR INTO OCEAN



(This artwork featured on special inside cover of A DOOR INTO OCEAN)

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It is disappointing to see such an important and excellent writer so unfairly ignored, and Swanwick's omission is especially annoying when one considers that *Ender's Game* just won the Nebula for best novel and that Card's original fantasy, "Hatrack River," appears in the same issue as Swanwick's article.

Richard Bleiler
Austin, TX

I dare say it is impossible not to omit someone in an article such as Swanwick's. Perhaps your letter will slightly redress the balance. Just to show you that this happens to everybody, a friend of mine wrote a whole book on science fiction for a publisher of mine and my name wasn't mentioned once in it. Not once!

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac,

Your editorial "The Kiss of Death?" in the October '86 issue has struck a sour note with me. While I agree that there may be some publishers who won't touch SF "since bookstores put them in odd corners behind the box in which the cat sleeps," there are others who do publish it, but need a gimmick to insure success.

Most of my two hundred or so Asimov books are good old friends, but in the past few years I've noticed a trend. It seems that books which would have been financial losers can become successful if *ISAAC ASIMOV* puts his name on them. Alas, a few of these would have been real clunkers without your help. Maybe we should call this trend "The Breath of Life"?

I know you have some extremely rigid requirements before you'll agree to co-author a book no matter who the publisher or author is, but I wonder how many times a month you're asked? I'll bet the thought was in Joel Davis' mind 109 issues ago. I will state emphatically that I wouldn't have bought a single issue of "ANOTHER NEW SF MAG!"

Doing a little extrapolation on this trend, I figure that by the year 2020 when you're mumbly mumbly years old, your book count will be up to 5,350. Publishers will have your name branded on the front of their latest releases as the co-author. Just before page 1 will be your contribution of an aimless doodle. It will be acclaimed by the publisher as your greatest literary accomplishment of the twenty-first century.

Sincerely,

Ross L. Mattis
North Scituate, RI

You sound cynical and bitter, alas, but things aren't quite as bad as that, or as easy. Books that I have not written every word of, are listed as "edited" by Isaac Asimov, and I assure you that when it says that, I edit *as well as contribute stuff to it. When a book has my name on it, but I* don't *contribute to it, I don't list it among my books, so I will never have 5,350 books even if every publisher were to put every book they published under an "Isaac Asimov presents" title.*

—Isaac Asimov

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GAMING

by Matthew J. Costello

Boy, do we love sequels. From multi-part slasher celebrations to the latest adventures of the Prizzi family, books and movies seem to have an easier time of it if they're a "part II." So it's perhaps natural that computer games have picked up this lucrative habit.

Hacker II (Activision, P.O. Box 7287, Mountain View, CA 94039; $34.95) is a sequel that tops the original, highly unusual *Hacker*. It is certainly one of the funniest games I have ever played and it does things no other game ever did before.

You open the box to *Hacker II* and find that you actually seem to have a copy of Actisource, the International Computer Hotline. Yes, it's an information service in the mold of Compuserv or The Source. You load the disc and, after a few welcoming words, you are presented with a menu offering financial information, shopping, and—

But the program stops. The friendly CIA breaks into your computer. It seems that your success with *Hacker I* has made you the candidate to rescue The Doomsday Papers from the Russians. The good news is that you won't have to go to the dismal Soviet Security Complex, located in sunny Siberia. No, you are loaned the use of the CIA's spy satellite network. With it you can control some mobile remote units (MRUs) and break into the complex.

The bad news is that the complex is a labyrinthine maze of security cameras, all ready to alert the guard patrols who in turn will summon something called The Annihilator. (More about this sweetheart later.)

And now here's the brilliant part of it all. (*Seriously*. You've never seen anything like this.) You can control up to four cameras in the complex with your satellites. There they are, right on the screen, showing you whatever corner of the complex you choose. But you can also tape sequences in the complex and then play them through the cameras. You can rewind, fast forward, everything you do with a real, ultimate-tech camera surveillance system.

Do you want to sneak in one of your MRUs (which resemble nothing more than Norman Bates' mother on a skateboard)? Simply videotape a deserted corridor, then

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play that tape into one of the security cameras while the MRU glides in.

Want to check when the last guard patrol went by in a certain section? Simply press record for that camera and then check it for guard activity later.

And the four monitor displays are (excuse the hyperbole) incredible. First, on each one, you have to adjust the vertical hold, otherwise it keeps rolling. (I mean, here you are handling millions of dollars of top CIA equipment and the *!*! picture rolls. It must be the low-bidder phenomenon.) Then you must select your initial views, deciding where to tape, where to go with live picture. Each image displays the time so you know whether it's in sync with real time, or displaying a previously recorded image.

The controls, all activated by a discreetly pointed finger, include a "Select" button to change cameras, Vertical-Hold (of course!), Camera, Monitor, VTR, and Bypass buttons. You also have controls to move your trusty MRU into the complex.

But don't let my enthusiastic description here fool you. The game is extremely difficult. Despite your ability to control the cameras, guard patrols wander by (and you can see them coming) quite frequently, and it isn't long before a red flashing light indicates that The Annihilator has been summoned.

The Anihilator resembles a large upside down U. As it gently approaches your MRU, it straddles it, and then lets its center section pummel down on the MRU, grinding it into dust. Then The Annihilator quickly sweeps the ash and glides away.

It's all very funny, and you can, of course, watch the whole thing again in an instant replay.

Hacker II comes with a hefty instruction book, The Multi-Function Switching Matrix Operators Manual, Vol. 1. It is, of course, Top Secret, and carries a $50,000 fine for unauthorized use. The manual, with its heady mixture of technical mumbo-jumbo and important information, is priceless. It will guide you through the intricacies of controlling your MRUs and using the complex computer surveillance system.

Mark my words. You've never seen anything like *Hacker II*. Because of its complexity, some people may have trouble getting started. But once all monitors are running, it's more than worth the effort as *Hacker II* offers a totally remarkable and novel gaming experience. ●

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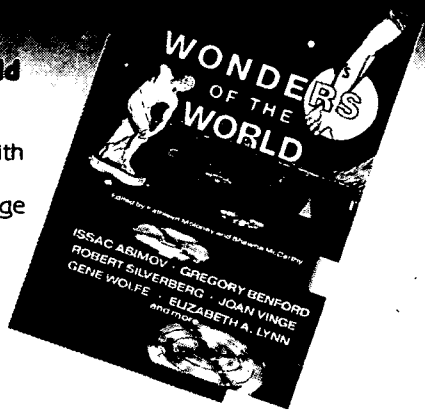

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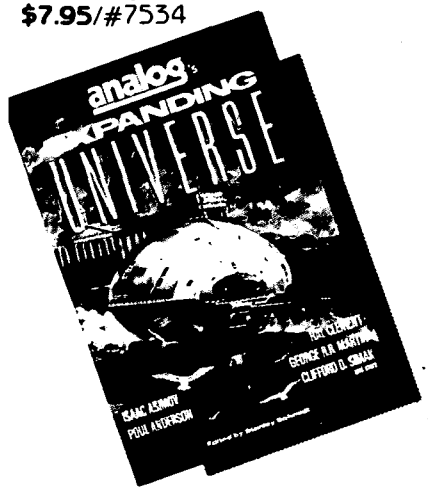

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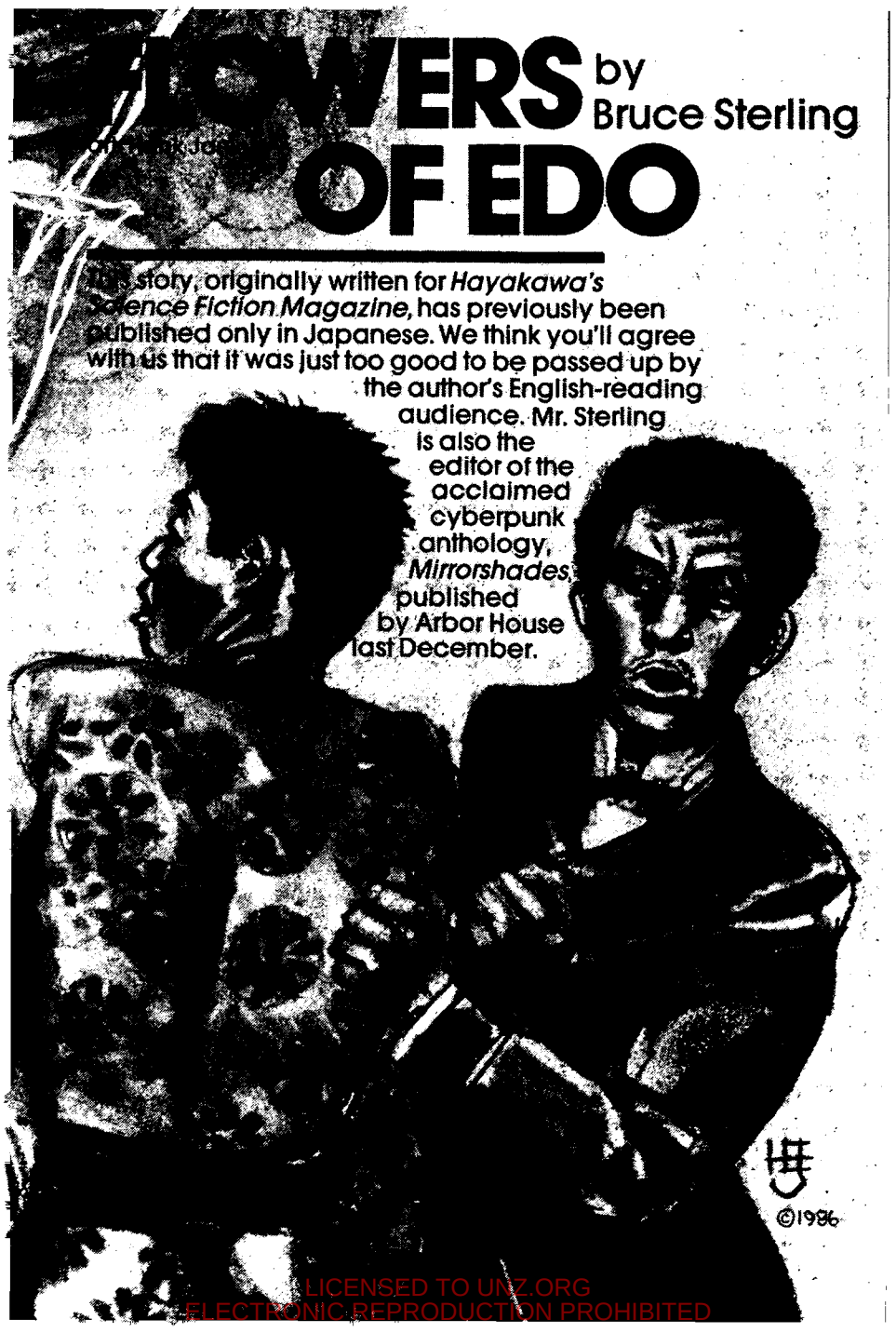
FLOWERS OF EDO

by Bruce Sterling

This story, originally written for *Hayakawa's Science Fiction Magazine*, has previously been published only in Japanese. We think you'll agree with us that it was just too good to be passed up by the author's English-reading audience. Mr. Sterling is also the editor of the acclaimed cyberpunk anthology, *Mirrorshades*, published by Arbor House last December.



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(with the author's thanks to
Yoshio Kobayashi and HAYAKAWA'S SF MAGAZINE)

Autumn. A full moon floated over old Edo, behind the thinnest haze of high cloud. It shone like a geisha's night-lamp through an old mosquito net. The sky was antique browned silk.

Two sweating runners hauled an iron-wheeled rickshaw south, toward the Ginza. This was Kabukiza District, its streets bordered by low, tile-roofed wooden shops. These were modest places: coopers, tobacconists, cheap fabric shops where the acrid reek of dye wafted through reed blinds and paper windows. Behind the stores lurked a maze of alleys, crammed with townsmen's wooden hovels, the walls festooned with morning glories, the tinder-dry thatched roofs alive with fleas.

It was late. Kabukiza was not a geisha district, and honest workmen were asleep. The muddy streets were unlit, except for moonlight and the rare upstairs lamp. The runners carried their own lantern, which swayed precariously from the rickshaw's drawing-pole. They trotted rapidly, dodging the worst of the potholes and puddles. But with every lurching dip, the rickshaw's strings of brass bells jumped and rang.

Suddenly the iron wheels grated on smooth red pavement. They had reached the New Ginza. Here, the air held the fresh alien smell of mortar and brick.

The amazing New Ginza had buried its old predecessor. For the Flowers of Edo had killed the Old Ginza. To date, this huge disaster had been the worst, and most exciting, fire of the Meiji Era. Edo had always been proud of its fires, and the Old Ginza's fire had been a real marvel. It had raged for three days and carried right down to the river.

Once they had mourned the dead, the Edokko were ready to rebuild. They were always ready. Fires, even earthquakes, were nothing new to them. It was a rare building in Low City that escaped the Flowers of Edo for as long as twenty years.

But this was Imperial Tokyo now, and not the Shogun's old Edo any more. The Governor had come down from High City in his horse-drawn coach and looked over the smoldering ruins of Ginza. Low City townsmen still talked about it—how the Governor had folded his arms—like this—with his wrists sticking out of his Western frock coat. And how he had frowned a mighty frown. The Edo townsmen were getting used to those unsettling frowns by now. Hard, no-nonsense, modern frowns, with the brows drawn low over cold eyes that glittered with Civilization and Enlightenment.

So the Governor, with a mighty wave of his modern, frock-coated arm, sent for his foreign architects. And the Englishmen had besieged the district with their charts and clanking engines and tubs full of brick and

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mortar. The very heavens had rained bricks upon the black and flattened ruins. Great red hills of brick sprang up—were they houses, people wondered, were they buildings at all? Stories spread about the foreigners and their peculiar homes. The long noses, of course—necessary to suck air through the stifling brick walls. The pale skin—because bricks, it was said, drained the life and color out of a man. . . .

The rickshaw drew up short with a final brass jingle. The older rickshawman spoke, panting. "Far enough, gov?"

"Yeah, this'll do," said one passenger, piling out. His name was Encho Sanyutei. He was the son and successor of a famous vaudeville comedian and, at thirty-five, was now a well-known performer in his own right. He had been telling his companion about the Ginza Bricktown, and his folded arms and jutting underlip had cruelly mimicked Tokyo's Governor.

Encho, who had been drinking, generously handed the older man a pocketful of jingling copper sen. "Here, pal," he said. "Do something about that cough, will ya?" The runners bowed, not bothering to overdo it. They trotted off toward the nearby Ginza crowd, hunting another fare.

Parts of Tokyo never slept. The Yoshiwara District, the famous Nightless City of geishas and rakes, was one of them. The travelers had just come from Asakusa District, another sleepless place: a brawling, vibrant playground of bars, Kabuki theaters, and vaudeville joints.

The Ginza Bricktown never slept either. But the air here was different. It lacked that earthy Low City working-man's glow of sex and entertainment. Something else, something new and strange and powerful, drew the Edokko into the Ginza's iron-hard streets.

Gaslights. They stood hissing on their black foreign pillars, blasting a pitiless moon-drowning glare over the crowd. There were eighty-five of the appalling wonders, stretching arrow-straight across the Ginza, from Shiba all the way to Kyobashi.

The Edokko crowd beneath the lights was curiously silent. Drugged with pitiless enlightenment, they meandered down the hard, gritty street in high wooden clogs, or low leather shoes. Some wore hakama skirts and jinbibaori coats, others modern pipe-legged trousers, with top hats and bowlers.

The comedian Encho and his big companion staggered drunkenly toward the lights, their polished leather shoes squeaking merrily. To the Tokyo modernist, squeaking was half the fun of these foreign-style shoes. Both men wore inserts of "singing leather" to heighten the effect.

"I don't like their attitudes," growled Encho's companion. His name was Onogawa and, until the Emperor's Restoration, he had been a samurai. But Imperial decree had abolished the wearing of swords, and Onogawa now had a post in a trading company. He frowned, and dabbed at his nose, which had recently been bloodied and was now clotting. "It's

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all too free-and-easy with these modern rickshaws. Did you see those two? They looked into our faces, just as bold as tomcats."

"Relax, will you?" said Encho. "They were just a couple of street runners. Who cares what they think? The way you act, you'd think they were Shogun's Overseers." Encho laughed freely and dusted off his hands with a quick, theatrical gesture. Those grim, spying Overseers, with their merciless canons of Confucian law, were just a bad dream now. Like the Shogun, they were out of business.

"But your face is known all over town," Onogawa complained. "What if they gossip about us? Everyone will know what happened back there."

"It's the least I could do for a devoted fan," Encho said airily.

Onogawa had sobered up a bit since his street fight in Asakusa. A scuffle had broken out in the crowd after Encho's performance—a scuffle centered on Onogawa, who had old acquaintances he would have preferred not to meet. But Encho, appearing suddenly in the crowd, had distracted Onogawa's persecutors and gotten Onogawa away.

It was not a happy situation for Onogawa, who put much stock in his own dignity, and tended to brood. He had been born in Satsuma, a province of radical samurai with stern, unbending standards. But ten years in the capital had changed Onogawa, and given him an Edokko's notorious love for spectacle. Somewhat shamefully, Onogawa had become completely addicted to Encho's side-splitting skits and impersonations.

In fact, Onogawa had been slumming in Asakusa vaudeville joints at least twice each week, for months. He had a wife and small son in a modest place in Nihombashi, a rather straitlaced High City district full of earnest young bankers and civil servants on their way up in life. Thanks to old friends from his radical days, Onogawa was an officer in a prosperous trading company. He would have preferred to be in the army, of course, but the army was quite small these days, and appointments were hard to get.

This was a major disappointment in Onogawa's life, and it had driven him to behave strangely. Onogawa's long-suffering in-laws had always warned him that his slumming would come to no good. But tonight's event wasn't even a geisha scandal, the kind men winked at or even admired. Instead, he had been in a squalid punch-up with low-class commoners.

And he had been rescued by a famous commoner, which was worse. Onogawa couldn't bring himself to compound his loss of face with gratitude. He glared at Encho from under the brim of his bowler hat. "So where's this fellow with the foreign booze you promised?"

"Patience," Encho said absently. "My friend's got a little place here in Bricktown. It's private, away from the street." They wandered down the

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New Data on L. RON HUBBARD'S

WRITERS OF THE FUTURE CONTEST

by Algis Budrys

Good news. L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of The Future Contest has been extended to the end of 1987, and even if you don't win a prize there are fresh features that could do you a lot of good.

First, there are meaningful no-strings cash prizes, and fringe benefits including recognition, encouragement, and a publication offer to the winners and some runners-up. Added have been faster reporting times, professional writing hints on your stories that *nearly* made it, and a series of invitational tuition-free special workshops for winners and some finalists, taught by expert speculative-fiction writers. So if you're an aspiring author of fantasy or science fiction, with no more than three short stories or one novelette professionally published, here's all you do: Enter the contest.

Every three-month quarter, beginning January 1, there's a round of judging for original manuscripts up to 17,000 words. A panel of top judges then selects three winners of $1000, $750 and $500. Third and Second Place also receive framed, very handsome certificates. First place receives a trophy guaranteed to dominate almost any mantelpiece. . . . And while the checks are mailed to the winners quickly, the certificates and trophies are conferred at our annual Awards ceremony, to which our new writers are invited, expenses paid.

Then, from among the four quarterly First Place winners, a special panel of judges selects the winner of the L. Ron Hubbard Gold Award to The Author Of The Writers of The Future Story of The Year. The announcement is made at the Awards, and results in an even more elegant trophy, plus an additional $4000.

Want some? There's no entry fee, and submitting your manuscript conveys no publication rights. (We do ask you to enclose a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.)

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Then there are the anthologies — *L. Ron Hubbard Presents WRITERS OF THE FUTURE Vols. I, II,* and, as of early 1987, *III.* I edit them for Bridge Publications, and we offer payments of up to $1000, in addition to the Contest prizes. The anthologies — which have impressed a lot of people, including other editors and publishers — publish the winners, and some runners-up. (They also include how-to-write essays by some of our judges.)

Summing up: If your story makes it into the semi-finals, you'll get it back with a helpfully intended critique from me. If it gets into the Finals, you may get a prize, you may at least get a publication offer, and if you're in the anthology, you're automatically invited to our next workshop, where we teach idea generation, idea improvement, and career management, along with other professional skills.

Good enough? Then you can write in for complete entry rules, or you can just go ahead and submit a manuscript, to:

Writers of the Future Contest
P.O. Box 1630
Los Angeles, CA 90078

A rational approach would be to borrow or buy the anthologies and study them. (The first two have an obsolete Contest address in them, but the mail will be forwarded.) They're $3.95 paperbacks, and you might as well see what you've been missing.

Meet you at the Awards?

— Algis Budrys

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Ginza, Encho pulling his silk top-hat low over his eyes, so he wouldn't be recognized.

He slowed as they passed a group of four young women, who were gathered before the modern glass window of a Ginza fabric shop. The store was closed, but the women were admiring the tailor's dummies. Like the dummies, the women were dressed with daring modernity, sporting small Western parasols, cutaway riding-coats in brilliant purple, and sweeping foreign skirts over large, jutting bustles. "How about that, eh?" said Encho as they drew nearer. "Those foreigners sure like a rump on a woman, don't they?"

"Women will wear anything," Onogawa said, struggling to loosen one pinched foot inside its squeaking shoe. "Plain kimono and obi are far superior."

"Easier to get into, anyway," Encho mused. He stopped suddenly by the prettiest of the women, a girl who had let her natural eyebrows grow out, and whose teeth, unstained with old-fashioned toothblacking, gleamed like ivory in the gaslight.

"Madame, forgive my boldness," Encho said. "But I think I saw a small kitten run under your skirt."

"I beg your pardon?" the girl said in a flat Low City accent.

Encho pursed his lips. Plaintive mewing came from the pavement. The girl looked down, startled, and raised her skirt quickly almost to the knee. "Let me help," said Encho, bending down for a better look. "I see the kitten! It's climbing up inside the skirt!" He turned. "You'd better help me, older brother! Have a look up in there."

Onogawa, abashed, hesitated. More mewing came. Encho stuck his entire head under the woman's skirt. "There it goes! It wants to hide in her false rump!" The kitten squealed wildly. "I've got it!" the comedian cried. He pulled out his doubled hands, holding them before him. "There's the rascal now, on the wall!" In the harsh gaslight, Encho's knotted hands cast the shadowed figure of a kitten's head against the brick.

Onogawa burst into convulsive laughter. He doubled over against the wall, struggling for breath. The women stood shocked for a moment. Then they all ran away, giggling hysterically. Except for the victim of Encho's joke, who burst into tears as she ran.

"Wah," Encho said alertly. "Her husband." He ducked his head, then jammed the side of his hand against his lips and blew. The street rang with a sudden trumpet blast. It sounded so exactly like the trumpet of a Tokyo omnibus that Onogawa himself was taken in for a moment. He glanced wildly up and down the Ginza prospect, expecting to see the omnibus driver, horn to his lips, reining up his team of horses.

Encho grabbed Onogawa's coat-sleeve and hauled him up the street before the rest of the puzzled crowd could recover. "This way!" They pounded drunkenly up an ill-lit street into the depths of Bricktown.

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Onogawa was breathless with laughter. They covered a block, then Onogawa pulled up, gasping. "No more," he wheezed, wiping tears of hilarity. "Can't take another . . . ha ha ha . . . step!"

"All right," Encho said reasonably, "but not here." He pointed up. "Don't you know better than to stand under those things?" Black telegraph wires swayed gently overhead.

Onogawa, who had not noticed the wires, moved hastily out from under them. "Kuwabara, kuwabara," he muttered—a quick spell to avert lightning. The sinister magic wires were all over the Bricktown, looping past and around the thick, smelly buildings.

Everyone knew why the foreigners put their telegraph wires high up on poles. It was so the demon messengers inside could not escape to wreak havoc amongst decent folk. These ghostly, invisible spirits flew along the wires as fast as swallows, it was said, carrying their secret spells of Christian black magic. Merely standing under such a baleful influence was inviting disaster.

Encho grinned at Onogawa. "There's no danger as long as we keep moving," he said confidently. "A little exposure is harmless. Don't worry about it."

Onogawa drew himself up. "Worried? Not a bit of it." He followed Encho down the street.

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The stonelike buildings seemed brutal and featureless. There were no homey reed blinds or awnings in those outsized windows, whose sheets of foreign glass gleamed like an animal's eyeballs. No cozy porches, no bamboo windchimes or cricket cages. Not even a climbing tendril of Edo morning glory, which adorned even the worst and cheapest city hovels. The buildings just sat there, as mute and threatening as cannonballs. Most were deserted. Despite their fireproof qualities and the great cost of their construction, they were proving hard to rent out. Word on the street said those red bricks would suck the life out of a man—give him beriberi, maybe even consumption.

Bricks paved the street beneath their shoes. Bricks on the right of them, bricks on their left, bricks in front of them, bricks in back. Hundreds of them, thousands of them. Onogawa muttered to the smaller man. "Say. What *are* bricks, exactly? I mean, what are they made of?"

"Foreigners make 'em," Encho said, shrugging. "I think they're a kind of pottery."

"Aren't they unhealthy?"

"People say that," Encho said, "but foreigners live in them and I haven't noticed any shortage of foreigners lately." He drew up short. "Oh, here's my friend's place. We'll go around the front. He lives upstairs."

They circled the two-story building and looked up. Honest old-fashioned light, from an oil lamp, glowed against the curtains of an upstairs window. "Looks like your friend's still awake," Onogawa said, his voice more cheery now.

Encho nodded. "Taiso Yoshitoshi doesn't sleep much. He's a little high-strung. I mean, peculiar." Encho walked up to the heavy, ornate front door, hung foreign-style on large brass hinges. He yanked a bell-pull.

"Peculiar," Onogawa said. "No wonder, if he lives in a place like this." They waited.

The door opened inwards with a loud squeal of hinges. A man's dishevelled head peered around it. Their host raised a candle in a cheap tin holder. "Who is it?"

"Come on, Taiso," Encho said impatiently. He pursed his lips again. Ducks quacked around their feet.

"Oh! It's Encho-san, Encho Sanyutei. My old friend. Come in, do."

They stepped inside into a dark landing. The two visitors stopped and unlaced their leather shoes. In the first-floor workshop, beyond the landing, the guests could dimly see bound bales of paper, a litter of toolchests and shallow trays. An apprentice was snoring behind a shrouded woodblock press. The damp air smelled of ink and cherrywood shavings.

"This is Mr. Onogawa Azusa," Encho said. "He's a fan of mine, down from High City. Mr. Onogawa, this is Taiso Yoshitoshi. The popular

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artist, one of Edo's finest."

"Oh, Yoshitoshi the artist!" said Onogawa, recognizing the name for the first time. "Of course! The woodblock print peddler. Why, I bought a whole series of yours, once. TWENTY-EIGHT INFAMOUS MURDERS WITH ACCOMPANYING VERSES."

"Oh," said Yoshitoshi. "How kind of you to remember my squalid early efforts." The ukiyo-e print artist was a slight, somewhat pudgy man, with stooped, rounded shoulders. The flesh around his eyes looked puffy and discolored. He had close-cropped hair parted in the middle and wide, fleshy lips. He wore a printed cotton houserobe, with faded bluish sunbursts, or maybe daisies, against a white background. "Shall we go upstairs, gentlemen? My apprentice needs his sleep."

They creaked up the wooden stairs to a studio lit by cheap pottery oil lamps. The walls were covered with hanging prints, while dozens more lay rolled, or stacked in corners, or piled on battered bookshelves. The windows were heavily draped and tightly shut. The naked brick walls seemed to sweat, and a vague reek of mildew and stale tobacco hung in the damp, close air.

The window against the far wall had a second-hand set of exterior shutters nailed to its inner sill. The shutters were bolted. "Telegraph wires outside," Yoshitoshi explained, noticing the glances of his guests.

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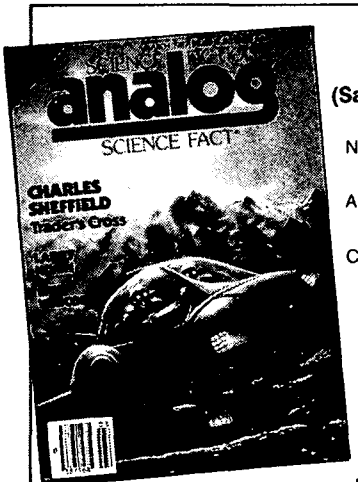

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The artist gestured vaguely at a couple of bedraggled floor cushions. "Please."

The two visitors sat, struggling politely to squeeze some comfort from the mashed and threadbare cushions. Yoshitoshi knelt on a thicker cushion beside his worktable, a low bench of plain pine with inkstick, grinder, and water cup. A bamboo tool jar on the table's corner bristled with assorted brushes, as well as compass and ruler. Yoshitoshi had been working; a sheet of translucent ricepaper was pinned to the table, lightly and precisely streaked with ink.

"So," Encho said, smiling and waving one hand at the artist's penurious den. "I heard you'd been doing pretty well lately. This place has certainly improved since I last saw it. You've got real bookshelves again. I bet you'll have your books back in no time."

Yoshitoshi smiled sweetly. "Oh—I have so many debts . . . the books come last. But yes, things are much better for me now. I have my health again. And a studio. And one apprentice, Toshimitsu, came back to me. He's not the best of the ones I lost, but he's honest at least."

Encho pulled a short foreign briar-pipe from his coat. He opened the ornate tobacco-bag on his belt, an embroidered pouch that was the pride of every Edo man-about-town. He glanced up casually, stuffing his pipe. "Did that Kabuki gig ever come to anything?"

"Oh yes," said Yoshitoshi, sitting up straighter. "I painted bloodstains on the armor of Onoe Kikugoro the Fifth. For his role in 'Kawanakajima Island.' I'm very grateful to you for arranging that."

"Wait, I saw that play," said Onogawa, surprised and pleased. "Say, those were wonderful bloodstains. Even better than the ones in that murder print, KASAMORI OSEN CARVED ALIVE BY HER STEPFATHER. You did that print too, am I right?" Onogawa had been studying the prints on the wall, and the familiar style had jogged his memory. "A young girl yanked backwards by a maniac with a knife, big bloody handprints all over her neck and legs. . . ."

Yoshitoshi smiled. "You liked that one, Mr. Onogawa?"

"Well," Onogawa said, "it was certainly a fine effort for what it was." It wasn't easy for a man in Onogawa's position to confess a liking for mere commoner art from Low City. He dropped his voice a little. "Actually, I had quite a few of your pictures, in my younger days. Ten years ago, just before the Restoration." He smiled, remembering. "I had the TWENTY-EIGHT MURDERS, of course. And some of the ONE HUNDRED GHOST STORIES. And a few of the special editions, now that I think of it. Like Tamigoro blowing his head off with a rifle. Especially good sprays of blood in that one."

"Oh, I remember that one," Encho volunteered. "That was back in the

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old days, when they used to sprinkle the bloody scarlet ink with powdered mica. For that deluxe bloody gleaming effect!"

"Too expensive now," Yoshitoshi said sadly.

Encho shrugged. "Remember NAOSUKE GOMBEI MURDERS HIS MASTER? With the maniac servant standing on his employer's chest, ripping the man's face off with his hands alone?" The comedian cleverly mimed the murderer's pinching and wrenching, along with loud sucking and shredding sounds.

"Oh yes!" said Onogawa. "I wonder whatever happened to my copy of it?" He shook himself. "Well, it's not the sort of thing you can keep in the house, with my age and position. It might give the children nightmares. Or the servants ideas." He laughed.

Encho had stuffed his short pipe; he lit it from a lamp. Onogawa, preparing to follow suit, dragged his long iron-bound pipe from within his coat-sleeve. "How wretched," he cried. "I've cracked my good pipe in the scuffle with those hooligans. Look, it's ruined."

"Oh, is that a smoking-pipe?" said Encho. "From the way you used it on your attackers, I thought it was a simple bludgeon."

"I certainly would not go into the Low City without self-defense of some kind," Onogawa said stiffly. "And since the new government has seen fit to take our swords away, I'm forced to make do. A pipe is an ignoble weapon. But as you saw tonight, not without its uses."

"Oh, no offense meant, sir," said Encho hastily. "There's no need to be formal here among friends! If I'm a bit harsh of tongue I hope you'll forgive me, as it's my livelihood! So! Why don't we all have a drink and relax, eh?"

Yoshitoshi's eye had been snagged by the incomplete picture on his drawing table. He stared at it raptly for a few more seconds, then came to with a start. "A drink! Oh!" He straightened up. "Why, come to think of it, I have something very special, for gentlemen like yourselves. It came from Yokohama, from the foreign trade zone." Yoshitoshi crawled rapidly across the floor, his knees skidding inside the cotton robe, and threw open a dented wooden chest. He unwrapped a tall glass bottle from a wad of tissue and brought it back to his seat, along with three dusty sake cups.

The bottle had the flawless symmetrical ugliness of foreign manufacture. It was full of amber liquid, and corked. A paper label showed the grotesquely bearded face of an American man, framed by blocky foreign letters.

"Who's that?" Onogawa asked, intrigued. "Their king?"

"No, it's the face of the merchant who brewed it," Yoshitoshi said with assurance. "In America, merchants are famous. And a man of the mer-

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chant class can even become a soldier. Or a farmer, or priest, or anything he likes."

"Hmmph," said Onogawa, who had gone through a similar transition himself and was not at all happy about it. "Let me see." He examined the printed label closely. "Look how this foreigner's eyes bug out. He looks like a raving lunatic!"

Yoshitoshi stiffened at the term. An awkward moment of frozen silence seeped over the room. Onogawa's gaffe floated in midair among them, until its nature became clear to everyone. Yoshitoshi had recovered his health recently, but his illness had not been a physical one. No one had to say anything, but the truth slowly oozed its way into everyone's bones and liver. At length, Onogawa cleared his throat. "I mean, of course, that there's no accounting for the strange looks of foreigners."

Yoshitoshi licked his fleshy lips and the sudden gleam of desperation slowly faded from his eyes. He spoke quietly.

"Well, my friends in the Liberal Party have told me all about it. Several of them have been to America and back, and they speak the language, and can even read it. If you want to know more, you can read their national newspaper, the *Lamp of Liberty,* for which I am doing illustrations."

Onogawa glanced quickly at Encho. Onogawa, who was not a reading man, had only vague notions as to what a "liberal party" or a "national newspaper" might be. He wondered if Encho knew better. Apparently the comedian did, for Encho looked suddenly grave.

Yoshitoshi rattled on. "One of my political friends gave me this bottle, which he bought in Yokohama, from Americans. The Americans have many such bottles there—a whole warehouse. Because the American Shogun, Generalissimo Guranto, will be arriving next year to pay homage to our Emperor. And the Guranto, the 'Puresidento,' is especially fond of this kind of drink! Which is called borubona, from the American prefecture of Kentukki."

Yoshitoshi twisted the cork loose and dribbled bourbon into all three cups. "Shouldn't we heat it first?" Encho said.

"This isn't sake, my friend. Sometimes they even put ice in it!"

Onogawa sipped carefully and gasped. "What a bite this has! It burns the tongue like Chinese peppers." He hesitated. "Interesting, though."

"It's good!" said Encho, surprised. "If sake were like an old stone lantern, then this borybona would be gaslight! Hot and fierce!" He tossed back the rest of his cup. "It's a pity there's no pretty girl to serve us our second round."

Yoshitoshi did the honors, filling their cups again. "This serving girl," Onogawa said. "She would have to be hot and fierce too—like a tigress."

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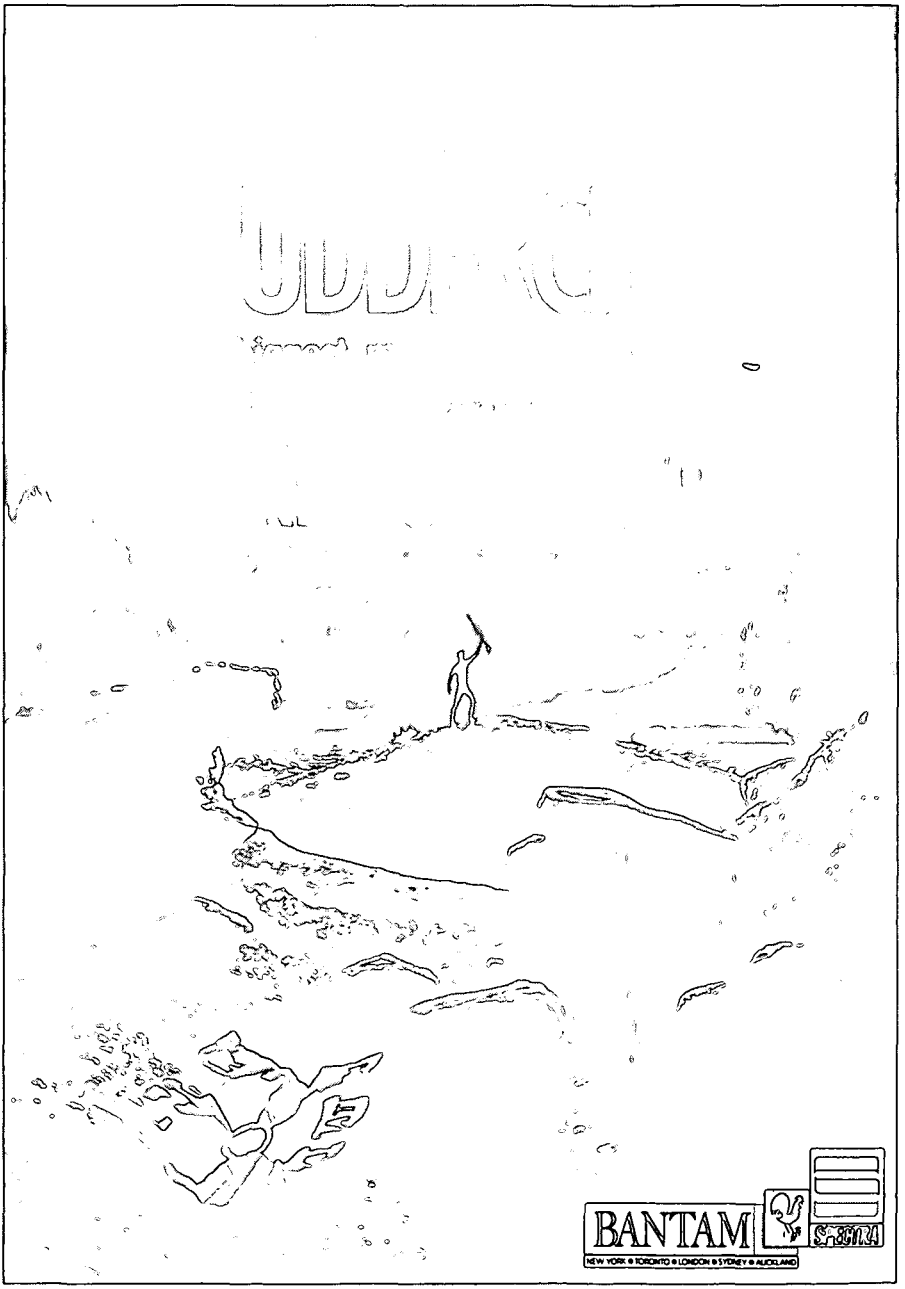

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Encho lifted his brows. "You surprise me. I thought you were a family man, my friend."

A warm knot of bourbon in Onogawa's stomach was reawakening an evening's worth of sake. "Oh, I suppose I seem settled enough now. But you should have known me ten years ago, before the Restoration. I was quite the tough young radical in those days. You know, we really thought we could change the world. And perhaps we did!"

Encho grinned, amused. "So! You were a shishi?"

Onogawa had another sip. "Oh yes!" He touched the middle of his back. "I had hair down to here, and I never washed! Touch money? Not a one of us! We'd have died first! No, we lived in rags and ate plain brown rice from wooden bowls. We just went to our kendo schools, practiced swordsmanship, decided what old fool we should try to kill next . . ." Onogawa shook his head ruefully. The other two were listening with grave attention.

The bourbon and the reminiscing had thawed Onogawa out. The lost ideals of the Restoration rose up within him irresistibly. "I was the despair of my family," he confided. "I abandoned my clan and my daimyo. We shishi radicals, you know, we believed only in our swords and the Emperor. Sonno joi! Remember that slogan?" Onogawa grinned, the tears of mono no aware, the pathos of lost things, coming to his eyes.

"Sonno joi! The very streets used to ring with it. 'Revere the Emperor, destroy the foreigners!' We wanted the Emperor restored to full and unconditional power! We demanded it in the streets! Because the Shogun's men were acting like frightened old women. Frightened of the black ships, the American black warships with their steam and cannon. Admiral Perry's ships."

"It's pronounced 'Peruri,' " Encho corrected gently.

"Peruri, then . . . I admit, we shishi went a bit far. We had some bad habits. Like threatening to commit hara-kiri unless the townsfolk gave us food. That's one of the problems we faced because we refused to touch money. Some of the shopkeepers still resent the way we shishi used to push them around. In fact that was the cause of tonight's incident after your performance, Encho. Some rude fellows with long memories."

"So that was it," Encho said. "I wondered."

"Those were special times," Onogawa said. "They changed me, they changed everything. I suppose everyone of this generation knows where they were, and what they were doing, when the foreigners arrived in Edo Bay."

"I remember," said Yoshitoshi. "I was fourteen and an apprentice at Kuniyoshi's studio. And I'd just done my first print. THE HEIKE CLAN SINK TO THEIR HORRIBLE DOOM IN THE SEA."

"I saw them dance once," Encho said. "The American sailors, I mean."

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"Really?" said Onogawa.

Encho cast a storyteller's mood with an irresistible gesture. "Yes, my father, Entaro, took me. The performance was restricted to the Shogun's court officials and their friends, but we managed to sneak in. The foreigners painted their faces and hands quite black. They seemed ashamed of their usual pinkish color, for they also painted broad white lines around their lips. Then they all sat on chairs together in a row, and one at a time they would stand up and shout dialogue. A second foreigner would answer, and they would all laugh. Later two of them strummed on strange round-bodied samisens, with long thin necks. And they sang mournful songs, very badly. Then they played faster songs and capered and danced, kicking out their legs in the oddest way, and flinging each other about. Some of the Shogun's counselors danced with them." Encho shrugged. "It was all very odd. To this day I wonder what it meant."

"Well," said Onogawa. "Clearly they were trying to change their appearance and shape, like foxes or badgers. That seems clear enough."

"That's as much as saying they're magicians," Encho said, shaking his head. "Just because they have long noses, doesn't mean they're mountain goblins. They're men—they eat, they sleep, they want a woman. Ask the geishas in Yokohama if that's not so." Encho smirked. "Their real power is in the spirits of copper wires and black iron and burning coal. Like our own Tokyo-Yokohama Railway that the hired English built for us. You've ridden it, of course?"

"Of course!" Onogawa said proudly. "I'm a modern sort of fellow."

"That's the sort of power we need today. Civilization and Enlightenment. When you rode the train, did you see how the backward villagers in Omori come out to pour water on the engine? To cool it off, as if the railway engine were a tired horse!" Encho shook his head in contempt:

Onogawa accepted another small cup of bourbon. "So they pour water," he said judiciously. "Well, I can't see that it does any harm."

"It's rank superstition!" said Encho. "Don't you see, we have to learn to deal with those machine-spirits, just as the foreigners do. Treating them as horses can only insult them. Isn't that so, Taiso?"

Yoshitoshi looked up guiltily from his absent-minded study of his latest drawing. "I'm sorry, Encho-san, you were saying?"

"What's that you're working on? May I see?" Encho crept nearer.

Yoshitoshi hastily plucked out pins and rolled up his paper. "Oh no, no, you wouldn't want to see this one just yet. It's not ready. But I can show you another recent one. . . ." He reached to a nearby stack and dexterously plucked a printed sheet from the unsteady pile. "I'm calling this series BEAUTIES OF THE SEVEN NIGHTS."

Encho courteously held up the print so that both he and Onogawa could see it. It showed a woman in her underrobe; she had thrown her

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scarlet-lined outer kimono over a nearby screen. She had both natural and artificial eyebrows, lending a double seductiveness to her high forehead. Her mane of jet-black hair had a killing little wispy fringe at the back of the neck; it seemed to cry out to be bitten. She stood at some lucky man's doorway, bending to blow out the light of a lantern in the hall. And her tiny, but piercingly red mouth was clamped down over a roll of paper towels.

"I get it!" Onogawa said. "That beautiful whore is blowing out the light so she can creep into some fellow's bed in the dark! And she's taking those handy paper towels in her teeth to mop up with, after they're through playing mortar-and-pestle."

Encho examined the print more closely. "Wait a minute," he said. "This caption reads 'Her Ladyship Yanagihara Aiko.' This is an Imperial lady-in-waiting!"

"Some of my newspaper friends gave me the idea," Yoshitoshi said, nodding. "Why should prints always be of tiresome, stale old actors and warriors and geishas? This is the modern age!"

"But this print, Taiso . . . it clearly implies that the Emperor sleeps with his ladies in waiting."

"No, just with Lady Yanagihara Aiko," Yoshitoshi said reasonably. "After all, everyone knows she's his special favorite. The rest of the Seven Beauties of the Imperial Court are drawn, oh, putting on their make-up, arranging flowers, and so forth." He smiled. "I expect big sales from this series. It's very topical, don't you think?"

Onogawa was shocked. "But this is rank scandal-mongering! What happened to the good old days, with the nice gouts of blood and so on?"

"No one buys those any more!" Yoshitoshi protested. "Believe me, I've tried everything! I did A YOSHITOSHI MISCELLANY OF FIGURES FROM LITERATURE. Very edifying, beautifully drawn classical figures, the best. It died on the stands. Then I did RAVING BEAUTIES AT TOKYO RESTAURANTS. Really hot girls, but old fashioned geishas done in the old style. Another total waste of time. We were dead broke, not a copper piece to our names! I had to pull up the floorboards of my house for fuel! I had to work on fabric designs— two yen for a week's work! My wife left me! My apprentices walked out! And then my health . . . my brain began to . . . I had nothing to eat . . . nothing . . . But . . . But that's all over now."

Yoshitoshi shook himself, dabbed sweat from his pasty upper lip, and poured another cup of bourbon with a steady hand. "I changed with the times, that's all. It was a hard lesson, but I learned it. I call myself Taiso now, Taiso, meaning 'Great Rebirth.' Newspapers! That's where the excitement is today! *Tokyo Illustrated News* pays plenty for political cartoons and murder illustrations. They do ten thousand impressions

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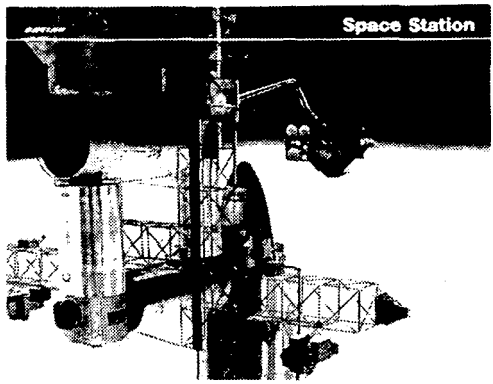

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at a stroke. My work goes everywhere—not just Edo, the whole nation. The nation, gentlemen!" He raised his cup and drank. "And that's just the beginning. The *Lamp of Liberty* is knocking them dead! The Liberal Party committee has promised me a raise next year, and my own rickshaw."

"But I like the old pictures," Onogawa said.

"Maybe you do, but you don't buy them," Yoshitoshi insisted. "Modern people want to see what's happening now! Take an old, theme picture—Yorimitsu chopping an ogre's arm off, for instance. Draw a thing like that today and it gets you nowhere. People's tastes are more refined today. They want to see real cannonballs blowing off real arms. Like my eye-witness illustrations of the Battle of Ueno. A sensation! People don't want print peddlers any more. 'Journalist illustrator'—that's what they call me now."

"Don't laugh," said Encho, nodding in drunken profundity. "You should hear what they say about me. I mean the modern writer fellows, down from the University. They come in with their French novels under their arms, and their spectacles and slicked-down hair, and all sit in the front row together. So I tell them a vaudeville tale or two. Am I 'spinning a good yarn'? Not any more. They tell me I'm 'creating naturalistic prose in a vigorous popular vernacular.' They want to publish me in a book." He sighed and had another drink. "This stuff's poison, Taiso. My head's spinning."

"Mine, too," Onogawa said. An autumn wind had sprung up outside. They sat in doped silence for a moment. They were all much drunker than they had realized. The foreign liquor seemed to bubble in their stomachs like tofu fermenting in a tub.

The foreign spirits had crept up on them. The very room itself seemed drunk. Wind sang through the telegraph wires outside Yoshitoshi's shuttered window. A low, eerie moan.

The moan built in intensity. It seemed to creep into the room with them. The walls hummed with it. Hair rose on their arms.

"Stop that!" Yoshitoshi said suddenly. Encho stopped his ventriloqual moaning, and giggled. "He's trying to scare us," Yoshitoshi said. "He loves ghost stories."

Onogawa lurched to his feet. "Demon in the wires," he said thickly. "I heard it moaning at us." He blinked, red-faced, and staggered to the shuttered window. He fumbled loudly at the lock, ignoring Yoshitoshi's protests, and flung it open.

Moonlit wire clustered at the top of a wooden pole, in plain sight a few feet away. It was a junction of cables, and leftover coils of wire dangled from the pole's crossarm like thin black guts. Onogawa flung up the casement with a bang. A chilling gust of fresh air entered the stale room

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and the prints danced on the walls. "Hey you foreign demon!" Onogawa shouted. "Leave honest men in peace!"

The artist and entertainer exchanged unhappy glances. "We drank too much," Encho said. He lurched to his knees and onto one unsteady foot. "Leave off, big fellow. What we need now . . ." He belched. "Women, that's what."

But the air outside the window seemed to have roused Onogawa. "We didn't ask for you!" he shouted. "We don't need you! Things were fine before you came, demon! You and your foreign servants . . ." He turned half-round, looking red-eyed into the room. "Where's my pipe? I've a mind to give these wires a good thrashing."

He spotted the pipe again, stumbled into the room and picked it up. He lost his balance for a moment, then brandished the pipe threateningly. "Don't do it," Encho said, getting to his feet. "Be reasonable. I know some girls in Asakusa, they have a piano . . ." He reached out.

Onogawa shoved him aside. "I've had enough!" he announced. "When my blood's up, I'm a different man! Cut them down before they attack first, that's my motto! Sonno joi!"

He lurched across the room toward the open window. Before he could reach it there was a sudden hiss of steam, like the breath of a locomotive. The demon, its patience exhausted by Onogawa's taunts, gushed from its wire. It puffed through the window, a gray, gaseous thing, its lumpy, misshapen head glaring furiously. It gave a steamwhistle roar and its great lantern eyes glowed.

All three men screeched aloud. The armless, legless monster, like a gray cloud on a tether, rolled its glassy eyes at all of them. Its steel teeth gnashed and sparks showed down its throat. It whistled again and made a sudden gnashing lurch at Onogawa.

But Onogawa's old sword-training had soaked deep into his bones. He leapt aside reflexively, with only a trace of stagger, and gave the thing a smart overhead riposte with his pipe. The demon's head bonged like an iron kettle. It began chattering angrily and hot steam curled from its nose. Onogawa hit it again. Its head dented. It winced, then glared at the other men.

The townsmen quickly scrambled into line behind their champion. "Get him!" Encho shrieked. Onogawa dodged a half-hearted snap of teeth and bashed the monster across the eye. Glass cracked and the bowl flew from Onogawa's pipe.

But the demon had had enough. With a grumble and crunch like dying gearworks, it retreated back towards its wires, sucking itself back within them, like an octopus into its hole. It vanished, but hissing sparks continued to drip from the wire.

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"You humiliated it!" Encho said, his voice filled with awe and admiration. "That was amazing!"

"Had enough, eh!" shouted Onogawa furiously, leaning on the sill. "Easy enough mumbling your dirty spells behind our backs! But try an Imperial warrior face to face, and it's a different story! Hah!"

"What a feat of arms!" said Yoshitoshi, his pudgy face glowing. "I'll do a picture. ONOGAWA HUMILIATES A GHOUL. Wonderful!"

The sparks began to travel down the wire, away from the window. "It's getting away!" Onogawa shouted. "Follow me!"

He shoved himself from the window and ran headlong from the studio. He tripped at the top of the stairs, but did an inspired shoulder-roll and landed on his feet at the door. He yanked it open.

Encho followed him headlong. They had no time to lace on their leather shoes, so they kicked on the wooden clogs of Yoshitoshi and his apprentice and dashed out. Soon they stood under the wires, where the little nest of sparks still clung. "Come down here, you rascal," Onogawa demanded. "Show some fighting honor, you skulking wretch!"

The thing moved back and forth, hissing, on the wire. More sparks dripped. It dodged back and forth, like a cornered rat in an alley. Then it made a sudden run for it.

"It's heading south!" said Onogawa. "Follow me!"

They ran in hot pursuit, Encho bringing up the rear, for he had slipped his feet into the apprentice's clogs and the shoes were too big for him.

They pursued the thing across the Ginza. It had settled down to headlong running now, and dropped fewer sparks.

"I wonder what message it carries," panted Encho.

"Nothing good, I'll warrant," said Onogawa grimly. They had to struggle to match the thing's pace. They burst from the southern edge of the Ginza Bricktown and into the darkness of unpaved streets. This was Shiba District, home of the thieves' market and the great Zojoji Temple. They followed the wires. "Aha!" cried Onogawa. "It's heading for Shinbashi Railway Station and its friends the locomotives!"

With a determined burst of speed, Onogawa outdistanced the thing and stood beneath the path of the wire, waving his broken pipe frantically. "Whoa! Go back!"

The thing slowed briefly, well over his head. Stinking flakes of ash and sparks poured from it, raining down harmlessly on the ex-samurai. Onogawa leapt aside in disgust, brushing the filth from his derby and frock coat. "Phew!"

The thing rolled on. Encho caught up with the larger man. "Not the locomotives," the comedian gasped. "We can't face those."

Onogawa drew himself up. He tried to dust more streaks of filthy ash

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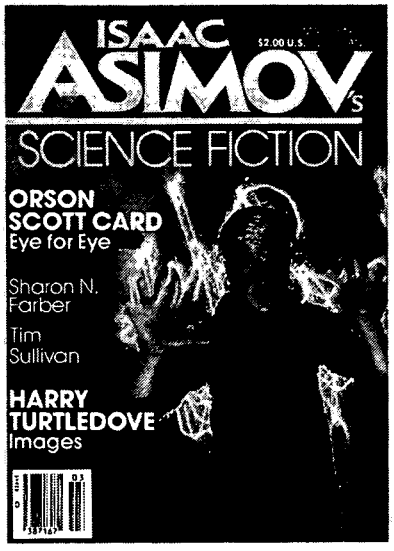

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from his soiled coat. "Well, I think we taught the nasty thing a lesson, anyway."

"No doubt," said Encho, breathing hard. He went green suddenly, then leaned against a nearby wooden fence, clustered with tall autumn grass. He was loudly sick.

They looked about themselves. Autumn. Darkness. And the moon. A pair of cats squabbled loudly in a nearby alley.

Onogawa suddenly realized that he was brandishing, not a sword, but a splintered stick of ironbound bamboo. He began to tremble. Then he flung the thing away with a cry of disgust. "They took our swords away," he said. "Let them give us honest soldiers our swords back. We'd make short work of such foreign foulness. Look what it did to my coat, the filthy creature. It defiled me."

"No, no," Encho said, wiping his mouth. "You were incredible! A regular Shoki the Demon Queller."

"Shoki," Onogawa said. He dusted his hat against his knee. "I've seen drawings of Shoki. He's the warrior demigod, with a red face and a big sword. Always hunting demons, isn't he? But he doesn't know there's a little demon hiding on the top of his own head."

"Well, a regular Yoshitsune, then," said Encho, hastily grasping for a better compliment. Yoshitsune was a legendary master of swordsmanship. A national hero without parallel.

Unfortunately, the valorous Yoshitsune had ended up riddled with arrows by the agents of his treacherous half-brother, who had gone on to rule Japan. While Yoshitsune and his high ideals had to put up with a shadow existence in folklore. Neither Encho nor Onogawa had to mention this aloud, but the melancholy associated with the old tale seeped into their moods. Their world became heroic and fatal. Naturally all the bourbon helped.

"We'd better go back to Bricktown for our shoes," Onogawa said.

"All right," Encho said. Their feet had blistered in the commandeered clogs, and they walked back slowly and carefully.

Yoshitoshi met them in his downstairs landing. "Did you catch it?"

"It made a run for the railroads," Encho said. "We couldn't stop it; it was way above our heads." He hesitated. "Say. You don't suppose it will come back here, do you?"

"Probably," Yoshitoshi said. "It lives in that knot of cables outside the window. That's why I put the shutters there."

"You mean you've seen it before?"

"Sure I've seen it," Yoshitoshi muttered. "In fact I've seen lots of things. It's my business to see things. No matter what people say about me."

The others looked at him, stricken. Yoshitoshi shrugged irritably. "The

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place has atmosphere. It's quiet and no one bothers me here. Besides, it's cheap."

"Aren't you afraid of the demon's vengeance?" Onogawa said.

"I get along fine with that demon," Yoshitoshi said. "We have an understanding. Like neighbors anywhere."

"Oh," Encho said. He cleared his throat. "Well, ah, we'll be moving on, Taiso. It was good of you to give us the borubona." He and Onogawa stuffed their feet hastily into their squeaking shoes. "You keep up the good work, pal, and don't let those political fellows put anything over on you. Their ideas are weird, frankly. I don't think the government's going to put up with that kind of talk."

"Someday they'll have to," Yoshitoshi said.

"Let's go," Onogawa said, with a sidelong glance at Yoshitoshi. The two men left.

Onogawa waited until they were well out of earshot. He kept a wary eye on the wires overhead. "Your friend certainly is a weird one," he told the comedian. "What a night!"

Encho frowned. "He's gonna get in trouble with that visionary stuff. The nail that sticks up gets hammered down, you know." They walked into the blaze of artificial gaslight. The Ginza crowd had thinned out considerably.

"Didn't you say you knew some girls with a piano?" Onogawa said.

"Oh, right!" Encho said. He whistled shrilly and waved at a distant two-man rickshaw. "A piano. You won't believe the thing; it makes amazing sounds. And what a great change after those dreary geisha samisen routines. So whiny and thin and wailing and sad! It's always, 'Oh, How Piteous Is A Courtesan's Lot,' and 'Let's Stab Each Other To Prove You Really Love Me.' Who needs that old-fashioned stuff? Wait till you hear these gals pound out some 'opera' and 'waltzes' on their new machine."

The rickshaw pulled up with a rattle and a chime of bells. "Where to, gentlemen?"

"Asakusa," said Encho, climbing in.

"It's getting late," Onogawa said reluctantly. "I really ought to be getting back to the wife."

"Come on," said Encho, rolling his eyes. "Live a little. It's not like you're just cheating on the little woman. These are high-class modern girls. It's a cultural experience."

"Well, all right," said Onogawa. "If it's cultural."

"You'll learn a lot," Encho promised.

But they had barely covered a block when they heard the sudden frantic ringing of alarm bells, far to the south.

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"A fire!" Encho yelled in glee. "Hey, runners, stop! Fifty sen if you get us there while it's still spreading!"

The runners wheeled in place and set out with a will. The rickshaw rocked on its axle and jangled wildly. "This is great!" Onogawa said, clutching his hat. "You're a good fellow to know, Encho. It's nothing but excitement with you!"

"That's the modern life!" Encho shouted. "One wild thing after another."

They bounced and slammed their way through the darkened streets until the sky was lit with fire. A massive crowd had gathered beside the Shinagawa Railroad Line. They were mostly low-class townsmen, many half-dressed. It was a working-class neighborhood in Shiba District, east of Atago Hill. The fire was leaping merrily from one thatched roof to another.

The two men jumped from their rickshaw. Encho shouldered his way immediately through the crowd. Onogawa carefully counted out the fare. "But he said fifty sen," the older rickshawman complained. Onogawa clenched his fist and the men fell silent.

The firemen had reacted with their usual quick skill. Three companies of them had surrounded the neighborhood. They swarmed like ants over the roofs of the undamaged houses nearest the flames. As usual, they did not attempt to fight the flames directly. That was a hopeless task in any case, for the weathered, graying wood, paper shutters, and reed blinds flared up like tinder, in great blossoming gouts.

Instead, they sensibly relied on firebreaks. Their hammers, axes, and crowbars flew as they destroyed every house in the path of the flames. Their skill came naturally to them, for, like all Edo firemen, they were also carpenters. Special banner-men stood on the naked ridgepoles of the disintegrating houses, holding their company's ensigns as close as possible to the flames. This was more than bravado; it was good business. Their reputations, and their rewards from a grateful neighborhood, depended on this show of spirit and nerve.

Some of the crowd, those whose homes were being devoured, were weeping and counting their children. But most of the crowd was in a fine holiday mood, cheering for their favorite fire teams and laying bets.

Onogawa spotted Encho's silk hat and plowed after him. Encho ducked and elbowed through the press, Onogawa close behind. They crept to the crowd's inner edge, where the fierce blaze of heat and the occasional falling wad of flaming straw had established a boundary.

A fireman stood nearby. He wore a kneelength, padded fireproof coat with a pattern of printed blocks. A thick protective headdress fell stiffly over his shoulders, and long padded gauntlets shielded his forearms to the knuckles. An apprentice in similar garb was soaking him down with

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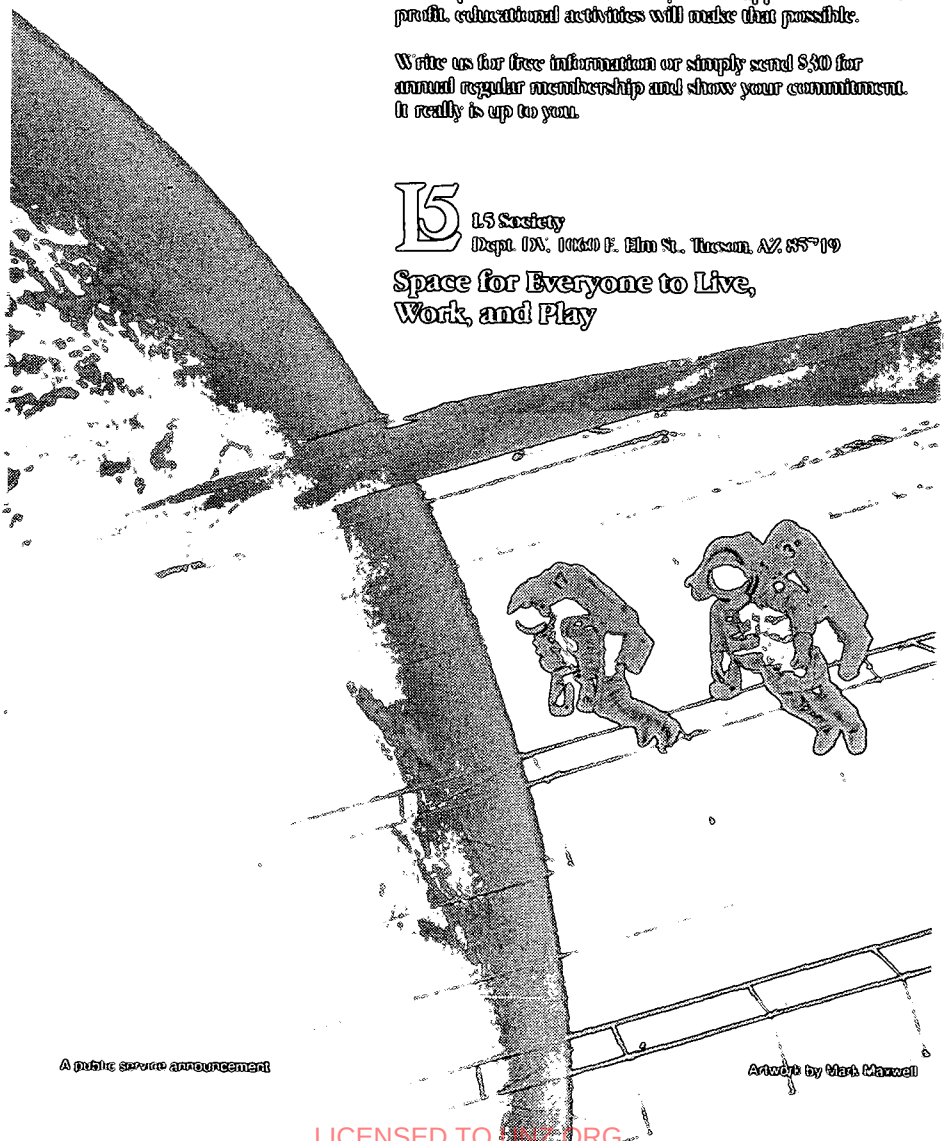

A public service announcement

Artwork by Mark Maxwell

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a pencil-thin gush of water from a bamboo hand-pump. "Stand back, stand back," the fireman said automatically, then looked up. "Say, aren't you Encho the comedian? I saw you last week."

"That's me," Encho shouted cheerfully over the roar of flame. "Good to see you fellows performing for once."

The fireman examined Onogawa's ash-streaked frock coat. "You live around here, big fella? Point out your house for me, we'll do what we can."

Onogawa frowned. Encho broke in hastily. "My friend's from uptown! A High City company man!"

"Oh," said the fireman, rolling his eyes.

Onogawa pointed at a merchant's tile-roofed warehouse, a little closer to the tracks. "Why aren't you doing anything about that place? The fire's headed right for it!"

"That's one of merchant Shinichi's," the fireman said, narrowing his eyes. "We saved a place of his out in Kanda District last month! And he gave us only five yen."

"What a shame for him," Encho said, grinning.

"It's full of cotton cloth, too," the fireman said with satisfaction. "It's gonna go up like a rocket."

"How did it start?" Encho said.

"Lightning, I hear," the fireman said. "Some kind of fireball jumped off the telegraph lines."

"Really?" Encho said in a small voice.

"That's what they say," shrugged the fireman. "You know how these things are. Always tall stories. Probably some drunk knocked over his sake kettle, then claimed to see something. No one wants the blame."

"Right," Onogawa said carefully.

The fire teams had made good progress. There was not much left to do now except admire the destruction. "Kind of beautiful, isn't it?" the fireman said. "Look how that smoke obscures the autumn moon." He sighed happily. "Good for business, too. I mean the carpentry business, of course." He waved his gauntleted arm at the leaping flames. "We'll get this worn-out trash out of here and build something worthy of a modern city. Something big and expensive with long-term construction contracts."

"Is that why you have bricks printed on your coat?" Onogawa asked.

The fireman looked down at the block printing on his dripping cotton armor. "They do look like bricks, don't they?" He laughed. "That's a good one. Wait'll I tell the crew."

Dawn rose above old Edo. With red-rimmed eyes, the artist Yoshitoshi stared, sighing, through his open window. Past the telegraph wires, bil-

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lowing smudge rose beyond the Bricktown rooftops. Another Flower of Edo reaching the end of its evanescent life.

The telegraph wires hummed. The demon had returned to its tangled nest outside the window. "Don't tell, Yoshitoshi," it burbled in its deep, humming voice.

"Not me," Yoshitoshi said. "You think I want them to lock me up again?"

"I keep the presses running," the demon whined. "Just you deal with me. I'll make you famous, I'll make you rich. There'll be no more slow dark shadows where townmen have to creep with their heads down. Everything's brightness and speed with me, Yoshitoshi. I can change things."

"Burn them down, you mean," Yoshitoshi said.

"There's power in burning," the demon hummed. "There's beauty in the flames. When you give up trying to save the old ways, you'll see the beauty. I want you to serve me, you Japanese. You'll do it better than the clumsy foreigners, once you accept me as your own. I'll make you all rich. Edo will be the greatest city in the world. You'll have light and music at a finger's touch. You'll step across oceans. You'll be as gods."

"And if we don't accept you?"

"You will! You must! I'll burn you until you do. I told you that, Yoshitoshi. When I'm stronger, I'll do better than these little flowers of Edo. I'll open seeds of Hell above your cities. Hell-flowers taller than mountains! Red blooms that eat a city in a moment."

Yoshitoshi lifted his latest print and unrolled it before the window. He had worked on it all night; it was done at last. It was a landscape of pure madness. Beams of frantic light pierced a smoldering sky. Winged locomotives, their bellies fattened with the eggs of white-hot death, floated like maddened blowflies above a corpse-white city. "Like this," he said.

The demon gave a gloating whir. "Yes! Just as I told you. Now show it to them. Make them understand that they can't defeat me. Show them all!"

"I'll think about it," Yoshitoshi said. "Leave me now." He closed the heavy shutters.

He rolled the drawing carefully into a tube. He sat at his worktable again, and pulled an oil lamp closer. Dawn was coming. It was time to get some sleep.

He held the end of the paper tube above the lamp's little flame. It browned at first, slowly, the brand-new paper turning the rich antique tinge of an old print, a print from the old days when things were simpler. Then a cigar-ring of smoldering red encircled its rim, and blue flame blossomed. Yoshitoshi held the paper up, and flame ate slowly down its length, throwing smoky shadows.

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Yoshitoshi blew and watched his work flare up, cherry-blossom white and red. It hurt to watch it go, and it felt good. He savored the two feelings for as long as he could. Then he dropped the last flaming inch of paper in an ashtray. He watched it flare and smolder until the last of the paper became a ghost-curl of gray.

"It'd never sell," he said. Absently, knowing he would need them tomorrow, he cleaned his brushes. Then he emptied the inkstained water over the crisp dark ashes. ●

NEXT ISSUE:

James Patrick Kelly returns to *IAsfm* next issue with our June cover story, "Glass Cloud." Phillip Wing is one of Earth's most prominent architects, and the huge mobile construct known as the Glass Cloud is his greatest accomplishment, but he doesn't expect that completing it will earn him an unwanted commission from the sinister alien Messengers, who make him an offer he soon finds he can't afford to refuse... Kelly's last story for us, "The Prisoner of Chillon," which appeared in our June issue last year, went on to become one of 1986's most acclaimed stories, and this intriguing and thought-provoking novelette may prove to be one of 1987's top stories as well. Also returning to these pages in June is **Charles Sheffield,** who takes us to the wind-swept barrens of Patagonia, at the tip of South America, for an encounter with a very strange and frightening Object, in "Trapalanda." From isolate Patagonia, **Walter Jon Williams** then takes us to even more remote destinations, far across the gulfs of space and six million years into a bizarre future, for a strange and evocative look at some very unusual "Dinosaurs."

Also in June: Nebula-and-Hugo winner **Orson Scott Card** returns with "Runaway," a sequel to last year's popular story "Hatrack River"; **Jane Yolen,** one of today's most popular and acclaimed fantasists, returns after too long an absence with the lyrical and bittersweet saga of "The White Babe"; and **Robley Wilson, Jr.** makes his *IAsfm* debut with a wry and tough-minded look at the odd social lifeways of the group known as "Flaggers." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for the June issue on sale on your newsstands on May 4, 1987.

Coming Up: new stories by **Robert Silverberg, Karen Joy Fowler, Jack Dann, Lisa Goldstein, Lucius Shepard, Avram Davidson, James Tiptree, Jr., Harry Turtledove, Kim Stanley Robinson, Charles de Lint, Gwyneth Jones, Andrew Weiner, Neal Barrett, Jr., George Alec Effinger,** and many others.

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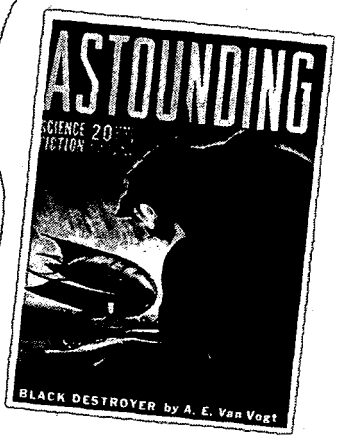

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NAZCA LINES

by Roger Dutcher & Robert Frazier

"Maria Reiche . . . thinks . . . some of them represent constellations (the spider being Orion for example . . .) It has been suggested that the figures were designed to be walked as spiritual exercise . . ."
"Mystery on the Desert—The Nazca Lines"
Sky & Telescope September 1984 p198

I.
I grew up on this pampa
and I followed these lines
when troubled or sleepless from the dreams.
My mother said the army helicopters woke me,
Blaming the gunfire which still erupts in the desert.
But the Masters saw from the start.
Now, as initiate I walk these lines often.
Day and night I trace them, hoping
beyond all hope to be one with them: Master and line;
To look down and see my village as our God does,
To know our place in the heavens.

II.
Shivering, clothed in old blankets,
which cover their Chinese assault rifles,
my Masters stand, silent as the Spider above.
There is no moon, yet the rocks glow.
No longer initiate, I prepare
for the test, this nightwalk
into a blacker night.

III.
One step . . .
Darkness Emptiness.
Never before have I faltered;
I struggle with the immensity . . .
Even my training has not prepared me:
The distance
The strange reality . . .
Those who have gone before
to trace The Spider at solstice
have left a web,
an indelible geometry
That I follow.

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IV.
The desert stones spin and become worlds,
instead of rock: visions.
Creatures are revealed,
move past me, speak, assist me.
Each has known our god who has
many names and many aspects;
their stories fill me.

V.
Tumbling through the constellations
Dreams fill my eyes before I can cry;
There is too much,
too much to remember.
How can I learn this?
Knowledge, ideas, even fear
course through me and are known.

VI.
I see our god below me
as he sees us, as he sees our work,
done ages ago to show his reflection,
and I know my walk will soon be over.
I see the Spider twining
many cultures into one weave.
I see a great work ahead of us, even
greater than Nazca, are we ready?

VII.
I tell them.
We sit by the campfire,
ringed by trucks and women busy with food.
They argue, comparing their journeys to mine.
I say I was among other worlds, on earth
not of this earth, a future they have yet to see.
They listen, show respect due another Master.
Clouds draw over the skies
Only Orion, no longer a hunter, is visible.
The helicopters are far away.
Old and young, we begin to pack
as if preparing for the long
long journey ahead.

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PERPETUITY BLUES

by Neal Barrett, Jr.

Neal Barrett, Jr. recently sold his novel, *Through Darkest America*, to our *Isaac Asimov Presents* line (which we are publishing in conjunction with Contemporary Books/Congdon & Weed). His short story "Sallie C." has just been published in Doubleday's *Best of the West* anthology, and we have a couple of his other gems in our inventory.

art: Laura Lakey

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On Maggie's seventh birthday she found the courage to ask Mother what had happened to her father.

"Your father disappeared under strange circumstances," said Mother.

"Sorghumdances?" said Maggie.

"Circumstances," said Mother, who had taught remedial English before marriage and was taking a stab at it again. "Circumstances: a condition or fact attending an event or having some bearing upon it."

"I see," said Maggie. She didn't, but knew it wasn't safe to ask twice. What happened was Daddy got up after supper one night and put on his cardigan with the patches on the sleeves and walked to the 7-11 for catfood and bread. Eight months later he hadn't shown up or called or written a card. Strange circumstances didn't seem like a satisfactory answer.

Mother died Thursday afternoon. Maggie found her watching reruns of "Rawhide" and "Bonanza." Maggie left South Houston and went to live with Aunt Grace and Uncle Ned in Marble Creek.

"There's no telling who he might of met at that store," said Aunt Grace. "Your father wasn't right after the service. I expect he got turned in Berlin. Sent him back and planted him deep in Montgomery Wards as a mole. That's how they do it. You wait and lead an ordinary life. You might be anyone at all. Your control phones up one day and says 'the water runs deep in Lake Lagoda' and that's it. Whatever you're doing you just get right up and do their bidding. Either that or he run off with that slut in appliance. I got a look at her when your uncle went down to buy the Lawnboy at the End-of-Summer Sale. Your mother married beneath her. I don't say I didn't do the same. The women in our family got no sense at all when it comes to men. We come from good stock but that doesn't put money in the bank. Your grandfather Jack worked directly with the man who invented the volleyball net they use all over the world in tournament play. Of course he never got the credit he deserved. This family's rubbed elbows with greatness more than once but you wouldn't know it. Don't listen to your Uncle Ned's stories. And for Christ's sake don't ever sit on his lap."

Maggie found life entirely different in a small town. There were new customs to learn. Jimmy Gerder and two other fourth graders took her down to the river after school and tried to make her take off her pants. Maggie didn't want to and ran home. After that she ran home every day.

Uncle Ned told her stories. Maggie learned why it wasn't a good idea to sit on his lap. "There was this paleontologist," said Uncle Ned, "he went out hunting dinosaur eggs and he found some. There was this student come along with him. It was this girl with nice tits is who it was. So this paleontologist says, 'be careful now, don't drop 'em, these old eggs

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are real friable.' And the girl says, 'hey that's great, let's fry the little fuckers.' " Uncle Ned nearly fell out of his chair.

Maggie didn't understand her uncle's stories. They all sounded alike and they were all about scientists and girls. Ned ran the hardware store on Main. He played dominoes on Saturdays with Dr. Harlow Pierce who also ran Pierce's Drugs. On Sundays he watched girls' gymnastics on TV. When someone named Tanya did a flip he got a funny look in his eyes. Aunt Grace would get Maggie and take her out in the car for a drive.

Maggie found a stack of magazines in the garage behind a can of kerosene. There were pictures of naked girls doing things she couldn't imagine. There were men in some of the pictures and she guessed they were scientists, too.

Aunt Grace and Uncle Ned were dirt poor but they gave a party for Maggie's eighth birthday. Maggie was supposed to pass out invitations at school but she threw them all away. Everyone knew Jimmy Gerder chased her home and knew why. She was afraid Aunt Grace would find out. Uncle Ned gave her a Philips screwdriver in a simulated leather case you could clip in your pocket like a pen. Aunt Grace gave her a paperback history of the KGB.

Maggie loved the freedom children enjoy in small towns. She knew everyone on Main who ran the stores, the people on the streets and the people who came in from the country Saturday nights. She knew Dr. Pierce kept a bottle in his office and another behind the tire in his trunk. She knew Mrs. Betty Keen Littler, the coach's wife, drove to Austin every Wednesday to take ceramics and came back whonkered with her shoes on the wrong feet. She knew about Oral Blue, who drank wine and acted funny and thought he came from outer space. Oral was her favorite person to watch. He drove a falling-down pickup and lived in a trailer by the river. He came into town twice a week to fix toasters and wire lamps. No one knew his last name. Flip Gator who ran Flip Gator's Exxon tagged him Oral Blue. Which fit because Oral's old '68 pickup was three shades of Sear's exterior paint for fine homes. Sky Blue for the body. Royal blue for fenders. An indeterminate blue for the hood. Oral wore blue shirts and trousers. Blue Nikes with the toes cut out and blue socks.

"Don't get near him," said Aunt Grace. "He might of been turned. And for Christ's sake don't ever sit in his lap."

Maggie kept an eye on Oral when she could. On Tuesdays and Thursdays she'd run home fast with Jimmy Gerder on her heels and duck up the alley to the square. Then she'd sit and watch Oral stagger around trying to pinpoint his truck. Oral was something to see. He was skinny as a rail and had a head too big for his body. Like a tennis ball stabbed

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with a pencil. Hair white as down and chalk skin and pink eyes. A mouth like a wide open zipper. He wore a frayed straw hat painted pickup-fender blue to protect him from the harsh Texas sun. Uncle Ned said Oral was a pure-bred genetic albino greaser freak and an aberration of nature. Maggie looked it up. She didn't believe anything Uncle Ned told her.

Ten days after Maggie was eleven Dr. Pierce didn't show up for dominoes and Ned went and found him in his store. He took one look and ran out in the street and threw up. The medical examiner from San Antone said Pierce had sat on the floor and opened forty-two-hundred pharmaceutical-type products, mixed them in a five-gallon jug and drunk most of it down. Which accounted for the internal explosions and extreme discoloration of the skin.

Maggie had never heard about suicide before. She imagined you just caught something and died or got old. Uncle Ned began to drink a lot more after Dr. Pierce was gone. "Death is one of your alternate lifestyles worth considering," he told Maggie. "Give it some thought."

Uncle Ned became unpleasant to be around. He mostly watched girls' field hockey or Eastern Bloc track and field events. Maggie was filling out in certain spots. Ned noticed her during commercials and grabbed out at what he could. Aunt Grace gave him hell when she caught him. Sometimes he didn't know who he was. He'd grab and get Grace, and she'd pick up something and knock him senseless.

Maggie stayed out of the house whenever she could. School was out and she liked to pack a lunch and walk down through the trees at the edge of town to the Colorado. She liked to wander over limestone hills where every rock you picked up was the shell of something tiny that had lived. The sun fierce-bright and the heat so heavy you could see it. She took a jar of ice water and a peanut butter sandwich and climbed up past the heady smell of green salt-cedar to the deep shade of big live oaks and native pecans. The trees here were awesome, tall and heavy-leafed, trunks thick as columns in a bad Bible movie. She would come upon the ridge above the river through a tangle of ropy vine, sneak quietly to the edge and look over and catch half a hundred turtles like green clots of moss on a sunken log. Moccasins crossed the river, flat heads just above the water leaving shallow wakes behind. She would eat in the shade and think how it would be if Daddy were there. How much he liked the dry rattle of locusts in the summer, the sounds that things made in the wild. He could tell her what bird was across the river. She knew a crow when she heard it, that a cardinal was red. Where was he? she wondered. She didn't believe he'd been a mole at Montgomery Wards. Aunt Grace was wrong about that. Why didn't he come back? He might leave Mother and

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she wouldn't much blame him if he did. But he wouldn't go off and leave *her*.

"I don't want you to be dead," she said aloud. "I can think of a lot of people who it's okay if they're dead, but not you."

She dropped pieces of sandwich into the olive-colored water. Fish came up and sucked them down. When the sun cut the river half in shadow she started back. There was a road through the woods, no more than ruts for tires but faster than over the hills. Walking along thinking, watching grasshoppers bounce on ahead and show the way. The sound came up behind her and she turned and saw the pickup teeter over the rise in odd dispersions of blue, the paint so flat it ate the sun in one bite. Oral blinked through bug spatters, strained over the wheel so his nose pressed flat against the glass. The pickup a primary disaster, and Oral mooning clown-faced, pink-eyed, smiling like a zipper, and maybe right behind some cut-rate circus with a pickled snake in a jar. He spotted Maggie and pumped the truck dead; caliche dust caught up and passed them both by.

"Well now, what have we got here?" said Oral. "It looks like a picnic and I flat missed it good. Not the first time, I'll tell you. I smell peanut butter I'm not mistaken. You want to get in here and ride?"

"What for?" said Maggie.

"Then don't. Good afternoon. Nice talking to you."

"All right. I will." Maggie opened the door and got in. She couldn't say why, it just seemed like the right thing to do.

"I've seen you in town," said Oral.

"I've seen you too."

"There's a lot more to life than you dream of stuck on this out of the way planet I'll tell you that. There's plenty of things to see. I doubt you've got the head for it all. Far places and distant climes. Exotic modes of travel and different ways of doing brownies."

"I've been over to Waco and Forth Worth."

"That's a start."

"You just say you're a space person, don't you," said Maggie, wondering where she'd gotten the courage to say that. "You're not really are you?"

"Not any more I'm not," said Oral. "My ship disintegrated completely over The Great Salt Lake. I was attacked by Mormon terrorists almost at once. Spent some time in Denver door-to-door. Realized I wasn't cut out for sales. Sometime later hooked up with a tent preacher in Bloomington, Indiana. Toured the tri-state area, where I did a little healing with a simple device concealed upon my person. Couldn't get new batteries and that was that. I was taken in by nuns outside of Reading, Pennsylvania, and treated well, though I was forced to mow lawns for some time. Later I was robbed and beaten severely by high-school girls

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in Chattanooga where I offered to change a tire. I have always relied on the kindness of strangers. Learned you can rely on 'em to kick you in the ass." Oral picked up a paper sack shaped like a bottle and took a drink. "What's your daddy do? If I'm not mistaken, he sells nails."

"That's not my daddy, that's my uncle. My father disappeared under strange circumstances."

"That happens. More often than you might imagine. There are documented cases. Things I could tell you you wouldn't believe. Look it up. Planes of existence we can't see or not a lot. People lost and floating about in interdimensional yogurt."

"You think my father's somewhere like that?"

"I don't know. I could ask."

"Thank you very much."

"I got this shirt from a fellow selling stuff off a truck. Pierre Cardin irregular is what it is. Dirt cheap and nothing irregular about it I can see. Whole stack of 'em there by your feet."

"They're all blue."

"Well, I know that."

"Where are we going now?"

"My place. Show you my interstellar vehicle and break open some cookies. You scared to be with me?"

"Not a lot."

"You might well ask why I make no effort to deny my strange origin or odd affiliation. I find it's easier to hide out in the open. You say you're from outer space, people tend to leave you alone. I've lived in cities and I like the country better. Not so many bad rays from people's heads. To say nothing of the dogshit in the streets. What do *you* think? You have any opinion on that? People in small towns are more tolerant of the rare and slightly defective. They all got a cousin counting his toes. I can fix nearly anything there is. Toasters. TVs. Microwave ovens. Everything except that goddamn ship. If Radio Shack had decent parts at all I'd be out of here and gone."

Oral parked the truck under the low-hanging branches of a big native pecan. The roots ground deep in the rigid earth, squeezed rocks to the surface like broken dishes. The tree offered shade to the small aluminum trailer, which was round as a bullet. Oral had backed it off the road some time before. The tires were gone, tossed off in the brush. The trailer sat on rocks. Oral ushered Maggie in. Found Oreos in a Folger's coffee can, Sprite in a mini-fridge. A generator hacked out back. The trailer smelled of wine and bananas and 3-in-One Oil. There was a hotplate and a cot. Blue shirts and trousers and socks.

"It's not much," said Oral. "I don't plan to stay here any longer than I have to."

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"It's very cozy," said Maggie, who'd been taught to always say something nice. The trailer curved in from the door to a baked plastic window up front. The floor and the walls and the roof were explosions of colored wire and gutted home computers. Blue lights stuttered here and there.

"What's all this supposed to be?" said Maggie.

"Funky, huh?" Oral showed rapid eye movement. "No wonder they think I'm crazy. The conquest of space isn't as easy as the layman might imagine. I figure on bringing in a seat from out of the truck. Bolt it right there. Need something to seal up the door. Inner tubes and prudent vulcanizing ought to do it. You know about the alarming lack of air out in space?"

"I think we had it in school."

"Well, it's true. You doing all right at that place?"

The question took Maggie by surprise. "At school you mean? Sort of. Okay I guess."

"Uh-huh." Oral hummed and puttered about. Stepped on a blue light and popped it like a bug. Found a tangle of wire from a purple Princess phone and cut it free. Got needle-nose pliers and twisted a little agate in to fit. "Wear this," he told Maggie. "Hang it round your waist and let the black dohicky kind of dangle over your personal private things."

"Well, I never!" Maggie didn't care for such talk.

"All right, don't. Run home all your life."

"You've been spying on me."

"You want a banana? Some ice cream? I like to crumble Oreos over the top."

"I think I better start on home."

"Go right up the draw and down the hill. Shortcut. Stick to the path. Tonight's a good night to view the summer constellations. Mickey's in the Sombrero. The Guppy's on the rise."

"I'll be sure and look."

When Maggie was twelve, Aunt Grace went to Galveston on a trip. The occasion was a distant cousin's demise. Uncle Ned went along. Which seemed peculiar to Maggie since they wouldn't *eat* together, and seldom spoke.

"We can't afford it, God knows," said Aunt Grace. "But Albert was a dear. Fought the Red menace in West Texas all his life. Fell off a shrimper and drowned, but how do we know for sure? *They'd* make it look accidental."

She left Maggie a list of things to eat. Peanut butter and Campbell's soup. Which was mostly what she got when they were home. Aunt Grace said meat and green vegetables tended to give young girls diarrhea and get their periods out of whack.

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"Stay out of the ham and don't thaw anything in the fridge. Here's two dollars that's for emergencies and not to spend. Call Mrs. Ketcher you get sick. Lock the doors. Come straight home from school and don't look at the cable."

"I'm scared to stay alone," said Maggie.

"Don't be a fraidy cat. God'll look after you if you're good."

"Don't tell anyone we're gone," said Uncle Ned. "Some greaser'll break in and steal us blind."

"For God's sake, Ned, don't tell her *that*."

Uncle Ned tried to slip a paper box in the back seat. Maggie saw him do it. When they both went in to check the house she stole a look. The carton was full of potato chips and Fritos, Cheetos and chocolate chip cookies. There was a cooler she hadn't seen iced down with Dr. Pepper and frozen Snickers and Baby Ruths. There were never any chips or candy bars around the house. Aunt Grace said they couldn't afford trash. But all this stuff was in the car. Maggie didn't figure they'd be bringing any back. When the car was out of sight she went straight to the garage and punched an ice pick hole in the kerosene can that hid Uncle Ned's stash of magazines. She did it on a rust spot so Ned'd never notice. Then she went out back and turned over flat rocks and gathered half a pickle jar of fat brown Texas roaches that had moved up from Houston for their health. Upstairs she emptied the jar where Aunt Grace kept her underwear and hose. Downstairs again she got the ice pick and opened the freezer door and poked a hole in one of the coils. In case the roasts and chickens and Uncle Ned's venison sausage had trouble thawing out she left the door open wide to summer heat.

"There," said Maggie, "y'all go fuck yourselves good." She didn't know what it meant but it seemed to work fine for everyone else.

When Maggie was thirteen, Jimmy Gerder nearly caught her. By now she knew exactly what he wanted and ran faster. But Jimmy had been going out for track. He had the proper shoes and it was only a matter of time. Purely by chance she came across Oral's gimmick in the closet. The little black stone he'd twisted on seemed to dance like the Sony when a station was off the air. Why not, she thought, it can't hurt. Next morning she slipped it on under her dress. It felt funny and kinda nice, bouncing on her personal private things. Jimmy Gerder caught her in an alley. Six good buddies had come to watch. Jimmy wore his track outfit with a seven on the back. A Marble Creek Sidewinder rattler on the front. He was a tall and knobby boy with runny white-trash eyes and bad teeth. Maggie backed against a wall papered with county commissioner flyers. Jimmy came at her in a fifty meter stance. His mouth moved funny; a peculiar glaze appeared. A strange invisible force picked

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him up and slammed him flat against the far alley wall. Maggie hadn't touched him. But something certainly had. Onlookers got away fast and spread the word. Maggie wasn't much of an easy lay. Jimmy Gerder suffered a semi-mild concussion, damage to several vertebrae and ribs.

She hadn't seen Oral in over a year. On the streets sometime, but not at the extraterrestrial aluminum trailer by the river.

"I wanted to thank you," she said. "I don't get chased any more. How in the world did you do that?"

"What took you so long to try it out? Don't tell me. I got feelings too."

Nothing seemed to have changed. There were more gutted personal home computers and blue lights, or maybe the same ones in different order.

"You wouldn't believe what happened to me," said Oral. He brought out Oreos and Sprites. "Got the ship clear out of the atmosphere and hit this time warp or something. Nearly got eat by Vikings. Worse than the Mormons. Fixed up the ship and flipped it out again. Ended up in Medieval Europe. Medicis and monks, all kinds of shit. Joined someone's army in Naples. Got caught and picked olives for a duke. Look at my face. They got diseases you never heard of there."

"Oh my," said Maggie. His face didn't look too good. The bad albino skin had holes like a Baby Swiss.

"I taught 'em a thing or two," said Oral, blinking one pink eye and then the other. "Simple magic tricks. Mr. Wizard stuff. Those babies'll believe anything. Ended up owning half of Southern Italy. Olive oil and real estate. Not a bad life if you can tolerate the smell. Man could make a mint selling Soft 'n Pretty and Sure."

"I'm glad you're back safe," said Maggie. She liked Oral a lot, and didn't much care what he made up or didn't. "What are you going to do now?"

"What can I do? Try to get this mother off the ground. I'm thinking of bringing Radio Shack to task in federal court. I feel I have a case."

Maggie listened to the wind in the trees. "Do you really think you can do it, Oral? You think you can make it work again?"

"Sure I can. Or maybe not. You know what gets to me most on this world? Blue. We got reds and yellows and greens up the ass. But no blue. You got blues all over." Oral put aside his Sprite and found a bottle in a sack. "You hear from your daddy yet?"

"Not a thing. I'm afraid he's gone."

"Don't count him out. Stuck in interstellar tofu most likely. Many documented cases."

"Daddy hates tofu. Says it looks like someone threw up and tried again."

"He's got a point."

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"What's it like where you come from, Oral. I mean where you lived before."

"You said you been to Fort Worth."

"Once when I was little."

"It doesn't look like that at all. Except out past Eighth Avenue by the tracks. Looks a little like that on a good day."

Maggie did fine in school after Jimmy Gerder left her alone. He cocked his head funny and walked with a limp. His folks finally sent him to Spokane to study forest conservation. By the time she reached sixteen Maggie began to make friends. She was surprised to be chosen for the Sidewinderettes, the third finest pep squad in the state. She joined the Drama Club and started writing plays of her own. She was filling out nicely and gave Uncle Ned a wide berth.

They were still dirt poor, but Uncle Ned and Aunt Grace attended several funerals a year. Two cousins died in Orlando not far from Disneyland, a car mishap in which both were killed outright. A nephew was mutilated beyond recognition in San Francisco, victim of a tuna-canning machine gone berserk. A new family tragedy could be expected around April, and again in late October when the weather got nice. Maggie was no longer taken in. She knew people died year round. They died in places like Cincinnati and Topeka where no one wanted to go. What Aunt Grace and Uncle Ned were doing was having fun. There wasn't much question about that. Maggie didn't like it but there was nothing she could do about it, either.

When Maggie was eighteen her play "Blue Sun Rising" was chosen for the senior drama presentation. It was a rousing success. Drama critic Harcourt Playce from San Angelo, Texas, told Maggie she showed promise as a writer. He gave her his personal card and the name of a Broadway theatrical producer in New York. The play was about a man who was searching for the true meaning of life on a world "very much like our own," as the program put it. There was no night at all on this world. A blue sun was always in the sky. Maggie wanted to ask Oral but was sure the principal wouldn't let him in.

Aunt Grace died a week after graduation. Maggie found her watching reruns of "M.A.S.H." She secretly wrote a specialist in Dallas. Told him what had happened to her mother and Aunt Grace. The specialist answered in time and said there might be genetic dysfunction. They were making great strides in the field. He advised her to avoid any shows in syndication.

Life with Uncle Ned wasn't easy. With Aunt Grace gone he no longer practiced restraint of any kind. Liquor came out of the nail bin at the store, and found its way to the kitchen. Girl and scientist magazines

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were displayed quite openly with *National Geographic*. Maggie began to jump when she heard a sound. There was a good chance Uncle Ned was there. Standing still too long was a mistake.

"You're going to have to stop that," said Maggie. "I mean it, Uncle Ned. I won't put up with it at all."

"You ought to get into gymnastics," said Uncle Ned. "I could work with you. Fix up bars and stuff out back. I know a lot more about it than you might think."

Maggie looked at Uncle Ned as if she were seeing him for the first time. His gaze was focused somewhere south of Houston. There seemed to be an electrical short in his face. His skin was the color of chuck roast hit with a hammer.

"I'm going to go," said Maggie. "I'm getting out of here."

"On what?" said Uncle Ned.

"I don't care on what, I'm just going. You try to stop me you'll wish you hadn't."

"You haven't got busfare to the bathroom."

"Then I'll walk."

"You do and you'll get raped and thrown in a ditch."

"I can get that first part here. I'll worry about the ditch when I come to it."

"Don't expect any help from me. I haven't got two dimes to rub together."

"You will," said Maggie. "Some cousin'll get himself hacked up in a sawmill in Las Vegas."

"Now that's plain ignorant," said Uncle Ned. "Especially for a high-school graduate. There isn't a lot of timber in Nevada. That's something you ought to know."

"Goodbye, Uncle Ned."

It took maybe nine minutes to pack. She took "Blue Sun Rising" and a number two pencil. Left her Sidewinderette pep jacket and took a sensible cloth coat. It was the tail end of summer in Texas, but New York looked cold on "Cagney and Lacey." She searched for something to steal. There were pawn shops all over New York. People stole for a living and sold the loot to buy scag and pot and ludes and whatever they could find to shoot up. There was no reason you couldn't buy food just as well. In the back of her aunt's closet she found a plastic beaded purse with eight dollars and thirty cents. Two sticks of Dentyne gum. Downstairs, Uncle Ned was watching the French National Girls' Field Hockey Finals. Maggie stopped at the front door.

"It was me poured kerosene on your magazines," she said. "I thawed all the meat out too."

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"I know it," said Uncle Ned. He didn't turn around. A girl named Nicole blocked a goal.

Hitchhiking was a frightening experience. She felt alone and vulnerable on the interstate. Oral's protective device was fastened securely about her waist. But what if it didn't work? What if she'd used it up with Jimmy Gerder? A man who sold prosthetic devices picked her up almost at once. His name was Sebert Lewis and he offered to send her to modeling school in Lubbock. He had helped several girls begin promising careers. Many were now in national magazines.

When Sebert stopped for gas, Maggie got out and ran. There were trucks everywhere. A chrome-black eighteen-wheeler city. They towered over Maggie on every side. In a moment she was lost. Some of the trucks were silent. Others rumbled deep and blinked red and yellow lights. There was no one about. She spotted a cafe through the dark. The drivers were likely all inside. It seemed like the middle of the night. French fries reached her on a light diesel breeze.

"I don't know what to do next!" she said aloud, determined not to cry. A big red truck stood by itself. A nice chrome bulldog on the front. It wouldn't hurt to rest and maybe hide from Sebert Lewis. She wrapped her coat around her and used her suitcase for a pillow. In a moment she was asleep. Only a short time later, a face looked directly into hers.

"Oh, Lord," said Maggie, "don't you dare do whatever it is you're thinking."

"Little lady, I'm not thinking on anything at all," the man said.

"Well all right then. If you mean it."

He was big, about as big a man as Maggie had ever seen. Dark brown eyes nearly lost in a face like a kindly pie. "You better be glad I'm a bug on maintenance," he said. "If I'd of took off you lyin' there under the tire I'd a squashed you flatter'n a dog on the road to Amarillo. You got a name, have you?"

"I'm Maggie McKenna from Marble Creek."

"You running away?"

"I'm going to New York City to write plays."

"You got folks back home?"

"My mother's dead and my father disappeared under strange circumstances. I'm a highschool graduate and a member of the Sidewinderettes. They don't take just everybody wants to get in. If you're thinking about calling Uncle Ned you just forget it."

"Not my place to say what you ought to do. I'm Billy C. Mace. How'd you get to here?"

"A man named Sebert Lewis picked me up. Said he'd put me through modeling school in Lubbock."

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"Lord Jesus!" said Billy Mace. "Come on, get in. Nothing's going to happen to you now."

Riding in the cab of an eighteen-wheeler wasn't anything at all like a '72 Ford. You towered over the road and could see everything for miles. Cars got out of the way. Billy talked to other truckers on the road. His CB handle was Boomer Billy. He let Maggie talk to Black Buddy and Queen Louise and Stoker Fish. The truck seemed invulnerable. Nothing could possibly reach her. The road hummed miles below. There was even a place to sleep behind the driver. Billy guessed she was hungry, and before they left the stop he got cheeseburgers and onion rings to go. Billy kept plenty of Fritos and Hershey bars with almonds in the truck, and had Dr Peppers iced in a cooler. Maggie went to sleep listening to Waylon Jennings tapes. When she woke it was morning. Billy said they'd be in Tulsa in a minute.

"I've never even been out of the state," said Maggie. "And here I am already in Oklahoma."

Billy pulled into a truck stop for breakfast. And then to another for lunch. He measured the distance in meals. "Two-hundred miles to lunch," he'd tell Maggie, or "a hundred-seventy to supper."

Maggie read him "Blue Sun Rising" while he drove.

"I don't know a lot about plays," said Billy when she was through, "but I don't see how that sucker can miss. That third act's a doozie."

"It needs a little work."

"Not as I see it it don't. You might want to rein in the Earth Mother symbolism a little, but that's just a layman's suggestion."

"You may be right," said Maggie.

She already knew Billy was well read. There was a shelf of books over the bunk. All the writers' names were John. John Gunther. John Milton. John D. McDonald.

"John's my daddy's name, God rest him," said Billy. "A man named John tells you something you can take it for a fact."

She told him about Uncle Ned and Aunt Grace. She didn't mention Oral Blue as they had not discussed the possibilities of extraterrestrial life. Billy was livid about her experience with Sebert Lewis.

"Lord Jesus himself was looking after you," he said. "No offense meant, but a girl pretty as you is just road bait, Maggie. That modeling studio thing is likely a front. I expect this Sebert's a Red agent and into hard astrology on the side. Probably under deep cover for some time. I imagine there's a network of such places spread right across the country. Sebert and his cohorts cruise the roads for candidates like yourself. Couple of days in a little room and you're hopeless on drugs, ready to do unspeakable acts of every kind. There's a possibility of dogs. You wake up in bed

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with some greaser with a beard gets military aid from this godless administration. That's where your tax dollar goes. I don't want to scare you but you come real close to a bad end."

"I guess I don't know much do I?" said Maggie. "I feel awful dumb."

"You learn quick enough when you drive the big rigs. There's things go on you wouldn't believe. The Russians got the news media eatin' out of their hands. I could give you names you'd recognize at once if I was to say 'em. There are biological agents in everything you eat. Those lines and numbers they got on the back of everything you buy? What that is is a code. If you're not in the KGB or the Catholic Church you can't read it. Don't eat anything that's got three sixes. That's the sign of the beast. I wish to God I had control of my appetite. I can feel things jabbing away inside. White bread and tomatoes are pretty safe. And food isn't the only way they got you. TV's likely the worst. I can't *tell* you the danger of watching the tube."

"I already know about that," said Maggie.

Billy Mace had it all arranged. As good as any travel agent could do. He left her with a Choctaw driver named Henry Black Bear in St. Louis. Henry took her to Muncie, Indiana. Gave her over to a skeletal black man named Quincy Pride. Quincy's CB handle was "Ghost." He taught her the names of every Blues singer who had lived in New Orleans at any time. He played their tapes in order of appearance. At Pittsburgh she transferred to Tony D. Velotta, a handsome Italian with curly hair. Maggie thought he was the image of John Travolta.

And then very early in the morning, she woke to the bright sun in her eyes and crawled down from the bunk and Tony pointed and said, "Hey, there it is, kid. We're here."

Maggie could scarcely believe her eyes. The skyline exploded like needles in the sun. A lonely saxophone wailed offstage. She could see the trees blossom in Central Park. Smell the hotdogs cooking at the zoo. They were still in New Jersey, but they were close.

"Lordy," said Maggie, "it looks near as real as a movie."

As they sliced through upper Manhattan, Tony pointed out the sights. Not that there was an awful lot to see. He tried to explain the Bronx and Brooklyn and Queens, drawing a map with his finger on the dash. Maggie was thoroughly confused, and too excited to really care.

"So what are you going to do now? Where you going to stay?"

"I don't know," said Maggie. "I guess I'll find a hotel or something."

"How much money you got, you don't mind me asking?"

"Eight dollars and thirty cents. Now I know that's not a lot. I may have to look for work. It could take some time before I get my play produced."

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"Holy Mother," said Tony. "You'd better stay with us."
"Now I couldn't do that. I'll be just fine."
"Right. For six, maybe eight minutes, tops."

The Velottas lived in Brooklyn. It might as well have been Mars as far as Maggie was concerned. There were eight people in the family. Tony and his wife Carla and little Tony who was two. Tony's father and mother, two younger brothers and a sister. They took in Maggie at once. They said she talked funny. They loved her. Carla gave her dresses. There was always plenty to eat. The Velottas had never heard of peanut butter. Maggie ate things called manicotti and veal piccata. Carla made spaghetti that didn't come out of a can. Nothing was like it was at Aunt Grace's and Uncle Ned's. The family was constantly in motion. Talking and running from one end of the house to the other. Everyone yelled at each other and laughed. Maggie tasted wine for the first time. She'd never seen a wine bottle out of a paper sack. Everyone worked in the Velotta family bakery. Maggie helped out, carrying trays of pastry to the oven.

Tony stayed a week and went back on the road. Maggie talked to Carla one evening after little Tony was in bed.

"I've got to go see my producer," she said. "You all have been wonderful to me but I can't live off you forever. The sooner I get 'Blue Sun Rising' on Broadway the better."

"Yeah, right," said Carla. She looked patient and resigned. The whole family conferred on directions. An intricate map was drawn. Likely locations of muggers and addicts were marked with an 'x.'

"Don't talk to *anyone*," said Tony's mother. She crossed herself and gave Maggie a medal. "Especially don't talk to blacks and Puerto Ricans. Or Jews or people with slanty eyes or turbans. No turbans! Avoid men with Nazi haircuts and blue eyes. *Anyone* with blue eyes."

"Watch out for men in business suits and ties," said Papa Velotta. "They carry little black cases. Like women's purses only flat. There's supposed to be business inside but there's not. It's dope is what it is. Everybody knows what's going on."

"Don't talk to anyone on skates with orange hair," said Carla.

"A Baptist with funny eyes will give you a pamphlet," said Papa. "Don't take it. Watch out for white socks."

"I'll try to remember everything," said Maggie.

"I'll light a candle," said Mama Velotta.

Maggie called Marty Wilde, the Broadway producer. Wilde said she had a nice voice and he liked to encourage regional talent. He would see her at three that afternoon.

"What's the name of this play?" he wanted to know.

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" 'Blue Sun Rising,' " said Maggie.
"Jesus, I like it. You don't have an agent or anything do you?"
"I just got in town," said Maggie.
"Good. I like to work with people direct."

Her first impression was right. Manhattan was as real as any cop show she'd ever seen. It was all there. The sounds, the smells, the people of many lands. There was a picture show on nearly every block. Everything was the same, everything was different. The city changed before her eyes. A man lying in the street. A kid tying celery to a cat. A woman dressed like a magazine cover, getting out of a cab. She watched the woman a long time. Maybe she'll come to see my play, Maggie thought. She looks like a woman who'd see a play.

Marty Wilde had a small office in a tall building. The building was nice outside. Inside, the halls were narrow. There was bathroom tile on the floors. A girl with carrot hair said Mr. Wilde would see her, and knocked on the wall. Marty came out at once.

"Maggie McKenna from Marble Creek, Texas," he said. "That's who you are. Maggie McKenna who wrote 'Blue Sun Rising.' Hey, get in here right now."

Marty ushered her in and offered a chair. The office was bigger than a closet and had faded brown pictures on the wall. Maggie realized these were Broadway greats, people she would likely meet later. There was very little light. The window looked out on a window. Black men in *Kung Fu* suits kicked at the air. There were piles of plays in the room. Plays spilling over tables and chairs and onto the floor. This sight left Maggie depressed. If there were that many plays in New York, they might never get around to "Blue Sun Rising."

Marty Wilde took her play and set it aside. He perched on the edge of his desk. "So tell me about Maggie McKenna. I can read an author like a page. I can see your play right on your face. A character sits down stage right. The phone rings. I can see that."

"That's amazing," said Maggie. Marty Wilde seemed worn to a nub. A turkey neck stuck out of his shirt. His eyes slept in little hammocks. "There's not much to tell about me. I think my play's good, Mr. Wilde. If it needs any changes I'm willing to do the work."

"Every play needs work. You take your Neil Simon or your Chekhov. A hit doesn't jump out of the typewriter and hop up on the stage."

"No, I guess not."

"You better believe it. Who's this guy give you my name?"

"Harcourt Playce, he works on the San Angelo paper."

"Short little man with a club foot. Wears a Mexican peso on a chain. Sure I remember."

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This didn't sound like Mr. Playce but Maggie didn't want to interrupt.

"You say you haven't got an agent."

"No, sir, I sure don't."

"Let's cut the sir stuff, Maggie. I'm older than you in years but there's a spirit of youth pervades the stage. You're a very pretty girl. How you fixed for cash?"

"Not real good right now."

"My point exactly. Here's what I suggest. It's just an idea I'm throwing out. I take in a few writers on this scholarship thing which is hey, my way of paying Lady Broadway back in a small way. You stay at my place, we work together. I got a friend can give you good photo work. He's affiliated with a national modeling chain. All semi-tasteful stuff. You'd know his name the minute I said it."

"You want to take my picture?"

"Just an idea. Let's get you settled in."

"This sounds a lot like girls and scientists, Mr. Wilde. I don't see what it has to do with my play."

Marty came off the desk. "I want you to be comfortable with this."

"I'm not very comfortable right now."

"So let's talk. Tell me what you're feeling."

"You just talk from over there."

"You remind me a lot of Debra Winger. In a very classical sense."

"You remind me of someone, too."

"Jesus, what a sweet kid you are. We won't try to push it. Just let it happen." He took a step closer. A strange invisible force picked him up and hurled him against the wall. Pictures of near-greats shattered. Some crucial fault gave way in the stacks of plays. Acts and scenes spilled over Marty on the floor.

"I think you broke something," said Marty. "Where'd you learn that hold? You're awful quick."

The girl with carrot hair came in.

"Call somebody," said Marty. "Get me on the couch."

"I don't think we can work together," said Maggie. "I'm real displeased with your behavior."

"I can see you don't know shit about the theatre," said Marty. "You can't just waltz in here and expect to see your name in lights."

"You ought to be in jail. If you try to get in touch with me, I'll press charges."

Carla said she could stay as long as she wanted. There wasn't any reason to go look for another place.

"I've got to try it on my own," said Maggie. "I believe in my play. I don't believe everyone on Broadway's like Marty Wilde."

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Carla could see that she was determined. "It's not easy to get work. Tony thinks a lot of you, Maggie. We all do. You're family."

"Oh, Carla," Maggie threw her arms around her. "You're the very best family I ever had."

Carla persuaded her to wait for the Sunday *Times*. Mama Velotta filled her up with food. "Eat now. You won't get a chance to later."

The room was on East 21st over an all-night Chinese restaurant. Maggie shared it with three girls named Jeannie, Eva, and Sherry. They all three worked for an insurance company. Maggie got a waitress job nights at the restaurant downstairs. There was just enough money to eat and pay the rent. She slept a few hours after work and took the play around days. No one wanted to see her. They asked her to mail copies and get an agent. Maggie cut down her meals to one a day, which allowed her to make a new copy of "Blue Sun Rising" every week. She even started a new play, using Sherry's portable Smith Corona and the backs of paper placemats from the job. The play was "Diesel and Roses," a psychological drama set in a truckstop cafe. Billy Mace was in it, and so was Henry Black Bear and Quincy Pride and Tony Velotta. Carla called. There was a postal money order from Marble Creek for $175 and a note.

"It's not good news," said Carla.

"Read it," said Maggie.

" 'Dying. Come home. Uncle Ned.' "

"Oh, Lord."

"I'm real sorry, honey."

"It's okay. We weren't close."

The thing to do was take the money and eat and make some copies of "Blue Sun Rising." And forget about Uncle Ned. Maggie couldn't do it. Even Uncle Ned deserved to have family put him in the ground. "I'll be back," she told New York, and made arrangements to meet Carla and get the money.

The first thing she noticed was things had changed in the year she'd been away. Instead of the '72 Ford, there was a late model Buick with a boat hitch on the back. Poking out of the garage was a Ranger fishing boat, an 18-footer with a big Merc outboard on the stern.

"You better be dead or dying," said Maggie.

The living room looked like Sears and Western Auto had exploded. There was a brand new Sony and a VCR, and hit tapes like *Gymnasts in Chains*. The kitchen was a wildlife preserve. Maggie stood at the door but wouldn't go in. Things moved around under plates. There were cartons of Hershey bars and chips. Canned Danish hams and foreign mustards. All over the house there were things still in boxes. Uncle Ned had

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dug tunnels through empty bottles and dirty books. There were new Hawaiian shirts. Hush Puppies in several different styles. A man appeared in one of the tunnels.

"I'm Dr. Krafft, I guess you're Maggie."

"Is he really dying? What's wrong with him?"

"Take your pick. The man's got everything. A person can't live like that and expect their organs to behave."

Maggie went upstairs. Uncle Ned looked dead already. There were green oxygen tanks and plastic tubes.

"I'm real glad you came. This is nice."

"Uncle Ned, where'd you get all this *stuff*?"

"That all you got to say? You don't want to hear how I am?"

"I can see how you are."

"You're entitled to bad feelings. I deserve whatever you want to dish out. I want to settle things up before I go to damnation and meet your aunt. Your father had an employee stock plan at Montgomery Wards. Left your mother well off and that woman was too cheap to spend it. We got the money when she died and you came to us. We sort of took these little vacations. Nothing big."

"Oh Lord."

"I guess we wronged you some."

"I guess I grew up on peanut butter and Campbell's soup is what happened."

"I've got a lot to answer for. There are certain character flaws."

"That's no big news to me."

"I can see a lot clearer from the unique position I got at the moment. Poised between one plane of being and the next. When your aunt died weakness began to thrive. I didn't mean to buy so much stuff."

"I don't suppose there's anything left."

"Not to speak of I wouldn't think. All that junk out there's on credit. It'll have to go back. The bank's got the house. There's forty-nine dollars in a Maxwell House can in the closet. I want you to have it."

"I'll take it."

"I wish you and me'd been closer. I hope you'll give me a kiss."

"I'd rather eat a toad," said Maggie.

Maggie saw Jimmy Gerder at the funeral. He still had a limp and kept his distance. She walked along the river to see Oral. It was fall, or as close as fall gets in that end of Texas. Dry leaves rattled and the Colorado was low. The log where she used to watch turtles was aground, trailing tangles of fishing line. The water was the color of chocolate milk and the turtles were gone. Oral was gone too. Brush had sprung up under the big native pecan. The place looked empty without the multi-blue pickup

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and the extraterrestrial trailer. Maggie wondered if he'd gotten things to work or just left. She asked around town, and no one seemed to remember seeing him go. After a Coke and a bacon and tomato at the cafe she figured she had enough to get back to New York if she sold a couple of things before Sears learned Uncle Ned was dead. Put that with her forty-nine dollar inheritance and she could do it. There was fifteen dollars left from the ticket. Even dying, Uncle Ned had remembered to pay for only one way.

Winter in New York was bad. The Chinese restaurant became an outlet for video tapes. Sherry and Jeannie and Eva helped all they could. They carried Maggie on the rent and ran copies of "Blue Sun Rising" down at the insurance company. The Velottas tried to help, but Maggie wouldn't have it. She got part-time work at a pizza place on East 52nd. After work she walked bone-tired to the theatre district and looked at the lights. She read the names on the posters and watched people get out of cabs. There was a cold wet drizzle every night, but Maggie didn't mind. The streets reflected the magic and made it better. When the first snow fell she sewed a blanket in her coat. The coat smelled like anchovies and Sherry said she looked like a Chinese pilot. "For God's sake, baby, let me loan you a coat."

"I can manage," said Maggie, "you've done enough."

She could no longer afford subways or buses so she walked every day from her room. She lost weight and coughed most of the time. The owner asked her to leave. He said customers didn't like people coughing on their pizza. She didn't tell the girls she'd lost her job. They'd want to give her money. She looked, but there weren't any jobs to be had. Especially for girls who looked like bag ladies and sounded like Camille. She kept going out every day and coming back at night. Hunger wasn't a problem. She felt too sick to eat. One night she simply didn't go home. "What's the point? What's the use pretending? No one wants to look at 'Blue Sun Rising.' I can't get a job. I can't do anything at all."

The snow began to fall in slow motion, flakes the size of lemons. Broadway looked like a big Christmas tree someone had tossed out and forgot to take the lights.

"Look at the blues," said Maggie. "Oral liked the blues so much."

A man selling food gave her a pretzel and some mustard. The pretzel came up at once. A coughing fit hit her. She couldn't stop. First nighters hurried quickly by. Maggie pulled her coat up close and looked in the steamy windows of Times Square. Radios and German bayonets were half-off. There was a pre-Christmas sale on marital aids. She could still taste the mustard and the pretzel. A black man in sunglasses approached.

"You hurtin' bad, mama. You need something, I can maybe get it."

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"No thank you," said Maggie.

I can't just stand here, she thought. I've got to do something. She couldn't feel her feet. Lights were jumping about. There was a paper box in the alley. The thing to do was to sit down and try to figure things out. She thought of a good line for "Diesel and Roses" and then forgot it. A cat looked in and sniffed; there were anchovies somewhere about. Maggie dreamed of daddy when he took her to the zoo. She dreamed of Oral under a tree and riding high with Billy Mace. The cab was toasty warm and Billy had burgers from McDonald's. She dreamed she heard applause. The cat started chewing on her coat. Oh Lord, I love New York, thought Maggie. If I can make it here, I can make it anywhere . . .

Carla looked ethereal, computer-enhanced.

"I guess I'm dying," said Maggie. "I'm sorry to get you out in this weather."

"Oh baby," said Carla, "hang on. Just hang on, Maggie."

Everything was fuzzy. The tubes hurt her nose. The walls were dark and needed painting. Sherry and Eva and Jeannie were there and all the Velottas. They bobbed about like balloons. Everyone had rings around their eyes.

"I want you to have 'Blue Sun Rising,' " said Maggie. "All of you. Equal shares. I've been thinking about off-Broadway lately. That might not be so hard. Don't see a man named Marty Wilde."

"All right, Maggie."

"She's going," someone said.

"Goodbye, Daddy. Goodbye, Oral," said Maggie.

The room looked nice. There was a big window with sun coming in. The doctor leaned down close. He smelled like good cologne. He smiled at Maggie and wrote something and left. A nice-looking man got up from a chair and stood by the bed.

"Hello. You feeling like something to drink? You want anything just ask."

"I'd like a Dr Pepper if you have one."

"You got it."

The man left and Maggie tried to stay awake. When she opened her eyes again it was late afternoon. The man was still there. A nurse came in and propped her up. The man brought her a fresh Dr Pepper.

"You look a lot like Tony," said Maggie. He did. The same crispy hair and dark eyes. A nice black suit and a gray tie. Maybe a couple of years older. "You know Tony and Carla?"

"They ask about you every day. You can see them real soon. Everybody's been pretty worried about you."

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"I guess I 'bout died."

"Yeah, I guess you did."

"This place looks awful expensive. I don't want the Velottas or anyone spending a bundle on me."

"They won't. No problem."

"Hey, I know a swell place like this isn't *free*."

"We'll talk about it. Don't worry." The man smiled at Maggie and went away.

Maggie slept and got her appetite back and wondered where she was. The next afternoon the man was back. He helped her in a wheelchair and rolled her down the hall to a glassed-in room full of plants. There were cars outside in a circular drive. A fountain turned off for the winter. A snow-covered lawn and a dark line of trees. Far in the distance, pale blue hills against a cold and leaden sky. Men in sunglasses and overcoats walked around in the snow.

"I guess you're going to tell me where I am sometime," said Maggie. "I guess you're going to tell me who you are and what I'm doing in this place I can't afford."

"I'm Johnny Lucata," the man said. "Call me Johnny, Maggie. And this house belongs to a friend."

"He must be a friend of yours, then. I don't remember any friends with a house like this."

"You don't know him. But he's a friend of yours too." He seemed to hesitate. He straightened his tie. "Look, I got things to tell you. Things you need to know. You want we can talk when you feel a little better."

"I feel okay right now."

"Maybe. Only this is kinda nutsy stuff, you know? I don't want to put you back in bed or nothing."

"Mr. Lucata, whatever it is, I think I'll feel a lot better when I know what's going on."

"Right. Why not? So what do you know about olives?"

"What?"

"Olives. They got olives over in Italy. There's a place where the toe's kicking Sicily in the face. Calabria. Something like a state, only different. The man lives here, he's got a lot of the olive oil business in Calabria. Been in his family maybe four, five hundred years. You sure you want to do this now?"

"I'm sure, Mr. Lucata."

"Okay. There's this city called Reggio di Calabria right on the water. You can look and see Sicily real good. A couple of miles out of town is this castle. Been there forever, only now it's a place for monks. So what happens is a couple of months back this monk's digging around and finds this parchment in a box. It's real old and the monk reads it. What he

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sees shakes him up real bad. He's not going to go to the head monk because Catholics got this thing about stuff that even *starts* to get weird. But he's a monk, right? He can't just toss this thing away. He's got a sister knows a guy who's family to the man who lives here. So the box gets to Reggio and then it gets to him." Johnny Lucata looked at Maggie. "Here's the part I said gets spooky. What this parchment says, Maggie, is that the old duke who started up the family left all the olive business to *you*."

Maggie looked blank. "Now that doesn't make sense at all, Mr. Lucata."

"Yeah, tell me. It's the straight stuff. The experts been over it. I got a copy I can show you. It's all in Latin, but you can read the part that says Maggie McKenna of Marble Creek, Texas. We got the word out and we been looking all over trying to find you. But your uncle died and you came back to New York. We didn't know where to take it after that. Then someone in Tony's family mentions your name and it gets to us. The thing is now, the man lives here, he doesn't know what to make of all this, and he don't want to think about it a lot. He sure don't want to ask some cardinal or the Pope. What he *wants* to do is make it right for *you*, Maggie. This duke is his ancestor and he figures it's a matter of honor. I mean, he doesn't see you ought to get it *all*, but you ought to be in for a couple of points. He wants me to tell you he'd like to work it where you get maybe three, four mill a year out of this. He thinks that's fair and he knows you're pressed for cash."

Maggie sat up straight. "Are you by any chance talking about dollars? Three or four million *dollars*?"

"Five. I think we ought to say five. He kind of left that up to me. Don't worry about the taxes. We'll work a little off-tackle Panama reverse through a Liechtenstein bank. You'll get the bread through a Daffy Duck Christmas Club account."

"I just can't hardly believe this, Mr. Lucata. It's like a dream or something. No one even knew I was going to *be* back then. Why, there wasn't even a *Texas*!"

"You got it."

"This castle. There's just these monks living there now?"

"Palazzo Azzuro. Means blue palace. I been there, it's nice. Painted blue all over. Inside and out. Every kind of blue you ever saw."

"*Blue*? Oh my goodness!"

"You okay?"

"Oral," said Maggie, "Oh Oral, you're the finest and dearest friend I ever had!"

When she was feeling like getting up and around, Johnny Lucata helped her find a relatively modest apartment off Fifth Avenue. Five

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mill or not, Maggie had been poor too long to start tossing money around. She did make sure there were always Dr Peppers and Baby Ruths in the fridge. And steaks and fresh fruit and nearly everything but Chinese food and pizza. Carla helped her find Bloomingdale's and Saks. Maggie picked out a new cloth coat. She sent nice perfume to Jeannie and Sherry and Eva, and paid them back triple what they'd spent to help her out. She gave presents to the Velottas and had everyone over for dinner. Johnny Lucata dropped by a lot. Just to see how she was doing. Sometimes he came in a cab. Sometimes he came in a black car with tinted windows and men wearing black suits and shades. He took her out to dinner and walks in the park. Sometimes Maggie made coffee, and they talked into the night. She read him "Blue Sun Rising" and he liked it.

"You don't have to say that, just because it's me."

"I mean it. I go to plays all the time. It's *real*, Maggie. You don't have to wonder what everybody's thinking, they just say it. I want you to talk to Whitney Hess."

"Whitney Hess the producer? Do you know him?"

"Yeah, sure I know him."

"I don't want to do that, Johnny. I don't want to get help from somebody just because he's a friend of yours. That's not right. I want 'Blue Sun Rising' to stand on its own."

"Are you kidding?" said Johnny. "Whitney Hess wouldn't buy a bad play from his dying mother. Besides, I want five points of this up front. You're not going to cut *me* out of a winner."

Tony and Carla and Tony's brothers and his sister and Mama and Papa Velotta dressed up for opening night. Johnny Lucata sent a limo to pick them up, and another to get Jeannie and Sherry and Eva. Tony got out the word, and the truckers found Billy Mace and Henry Black Bear and Quincy Pride. They all had seventh row center seats.

Maggie thought sure she was dreaming. Her name up in lights at the Shubert Theatre. Ladies in furs and jewels dressed up for opening night. Spotlights and TV cameras and people she'd only seen in the movies. She stayed outside a long time. Standing in the very same spot where she'd thrown up pretzels in the street. Not far from the alley where she'd curled up in a box and nearly died. You just never know, she told herself. You just don't.

There was no need to wait for the reviews. After the first act, Whitney Hess said they had a smash on their hands. After the third act curtain, even Maggie believed it was true. The audience came to its feet and shouted, "author! author!" and someone told Maggie they meant *her*.

Johnny hurried her out of the Shubert by the side door. He wouldn't

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say where they were going. A black car was by the curb around the corner. There were men in overcoats and shades.

"I want you to meet somebody," said Johnny, and opened the rear door. "This is Maggie McKenna," he said. "Maggie, I'd like you to meet my father."

Maggie caught the proper respect in his voice. She looked inside and saw an old man sitting in the corner. He was lost in a black suit, a man no more substantial than a cut-rate chicken in a sack.

"That was a nice play," he said. "I like it a lot. I like plays with a story you can't guess what's going to happen all the time. There's nothing on the television but dirt. The Reds got people in the business. They built this place in Chelyabinsk looks just like Twentieth Century Fox. Writers, directors, the works. They teach 'em how to do stuff rots out your head then they send them over here. This is a great country. You keep writing nice plays."

"Thank you," said Maggie, "I'm very glad you liked it."

"Here. A little present from me. Your big night. You remember where you got it."

"I'm very grateful," said Maggie. "For everything." She leaned in and kissed him on the cheek.

"That's very nice. You're a nice girl. She's a nice girl, Johnny."

Johnny took her back inside, and on the way home after the big party Whitney Hess gave at the Plaza, Maggie opened her present. It was a pendant shaped like an olive. Pale emeralds formed the olive and a ruby sat on top for the pimiento.

"It's just lovely," said Maggie.

"The old man's got a lot of class."

"Why didn't you tell me that was your father's house, Johnny? I kinda guessed later but I didn't know for sure."

"Wasn't the right time."

"And it's the right time now?"

"Yeah, I guess it is."

"Whitney Hess wants to go into rehearsal on 'Diesel and Roses' next month. I'm going to ask Billy Mace and Henry Black Bear and Quincy Pride to come on as technical advisors. There's not a thing for them to do, but I'd like to have them around."

"That's nice. It's a good idea."

"Whitney says everyone wants the movie rights to 'Blue Sun Rising.' Which means we'll get a picture deal up front for 'Diesel and Roses.' Oh Lordy, I can't believe all this is really happening. Everything in my life's been either awful or as good as it can be."

"It's going to stay good now, Maggie." He leaned over and kissed her quickly. Maggie stared at the tinted glass.

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"You've never done *that* before."

"Well, I have now."

Maggie wondered what was happening inside. She felt funny all over. She was dizzy from the kiss. She liked Johnny a lot but she'd never liked him quite like this. She wanted him to kiss her again and again, but not *now*. Not wearing Oral's protective device, which she'd worn since her very first day in New York. It was something she'd never thought about before. What if you really *wanted* someone to do something to you? Would the wire and the black stone know that it wasn't Jimmy Gerder or Marty Wilde? She certainly couldn't take the chance of finding out.

The phone was ringing when they got to her apartment.

"You're famous," said Johnny. "That'll go on all night."

"No, it won't," said Maggie, "just take it off the hook. I can be famous tomorrow. Tonight I just want to be me."

Johnny had a funny look in his eyes. She was sure he was going to kiss her right then. "Just wait right there," she said. "Don't go away. Get me a Dr Pepper and open yourself a beer." She hurried into the bedroom and shut the door. Raised up her skirt and slipped the little wire off her waist. Her heart was beating fast. "I hope you know what you're doing, Maggie McKenna."

Johnny gave a decidedly angry shout from the other room. Another man yelled. Something fell to the floor.

"Good heavens, what's that?" said Maggie. She rushed into the room. Johnny had a young man backed against the wall, threatening him with a fist. The man wore a patched cardigan sweater and khaki pants. He was trying to hit Johnny with a sack.

"Who the hell are *you*," said Johnny, "what are you doing in here!"

"Oh my God," said Maggie. She stopped in her tracks, then ran past Johnny and threw her arms around the other man's neck. "Oh Daddy, I *knew* you wouldn't leave me! I knew you'd come back!"

"Maggie? Is that you? Why, you're all grown up! Say, what a looker you are. Where am I? How's your mother?"

"We'll talk about that. Just sit down and rest." She could hardly see through her tears. "I'll explain," she told Johnny. "At least I'll give it a try. Oh, Oral, I hope you're wherever it is you want to be. Johnny, get Daddy a Dr Pepper." She gave him the sack. "Put this in the kitchen and you come right back."

"It's just catfood and bread," said Daddy. "I think that fella there took me wrong."

"Everything's all right now."

"Maggie, I feel like I've been floating around in yogurt. Forever or maybe an hour and a half. It's hard to say. I don't know. I'm greatly confused for the moment. I *ought* to be more than five years older'n you."

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"It happens. There are documented cases. Just sit down and rest. There's plenty of time to talk." Johnny came back with a Dr Pepper. She gave it to her father and led Johnny to the kitchen.

"I don't get it," said Johnny.

"You got all that business with the monks, you can learn to handle this. Just hold me a minute, all right? And do what you did in the car."

Johnny kissed her a very long time. Maggie was sure she was going to faint.

"I'm a real serious guy," said Johnny. "I'm not just playing around. I got very strong emotions."

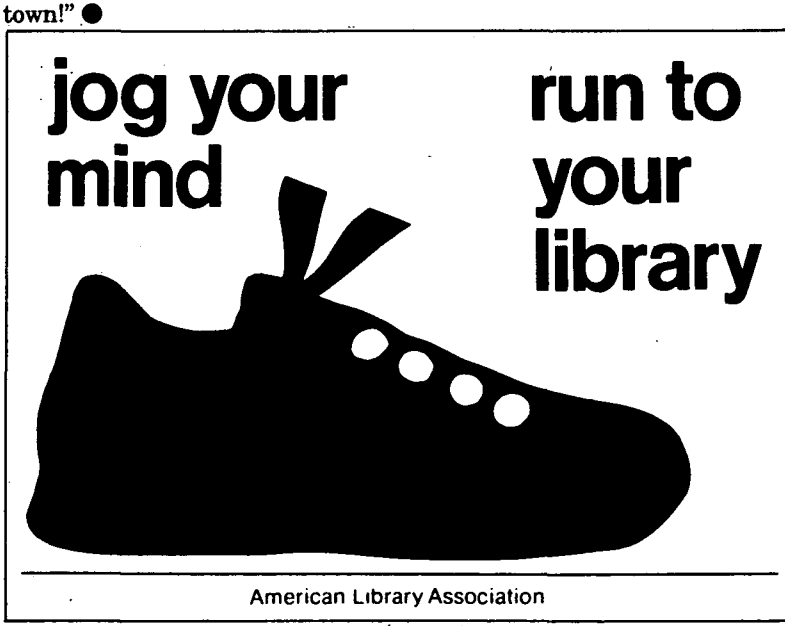
"I like you a lot," said Maggie. "I'm not sure I could love a man in your line of work."

"I'm in olives. I got a nice family business."

"You've got a family in overcoats and shades, Johnny Lucata."

"Okay, so we'll work something out."

"I guess maybe we will. I keep forgetting I'm in olive oil too. Maybe you better kiss me again. Johnny there's *so* much I want us to do. I want to show you Marble Creek. I want to show you green turtles on a log and the Sidewinderettes doing a halftime double-snake whip. I want to see every single shade of blue in that castle and I've got a simply *great* idea for a play. Oh, Johnny, Daddy's back and you're here and I've got about everything there *is*. New York is such a knocked-out crazy wonderful town!" ●



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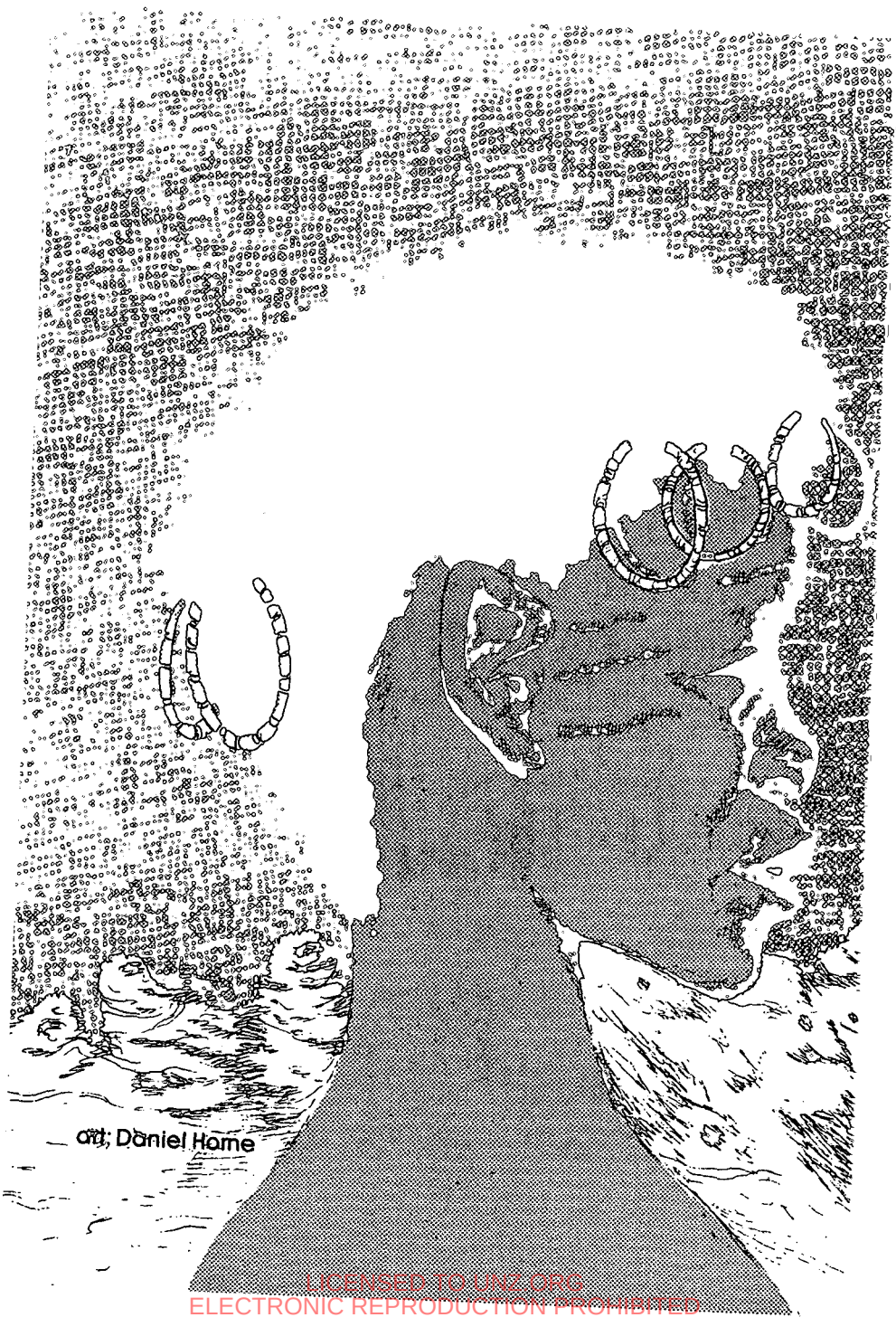

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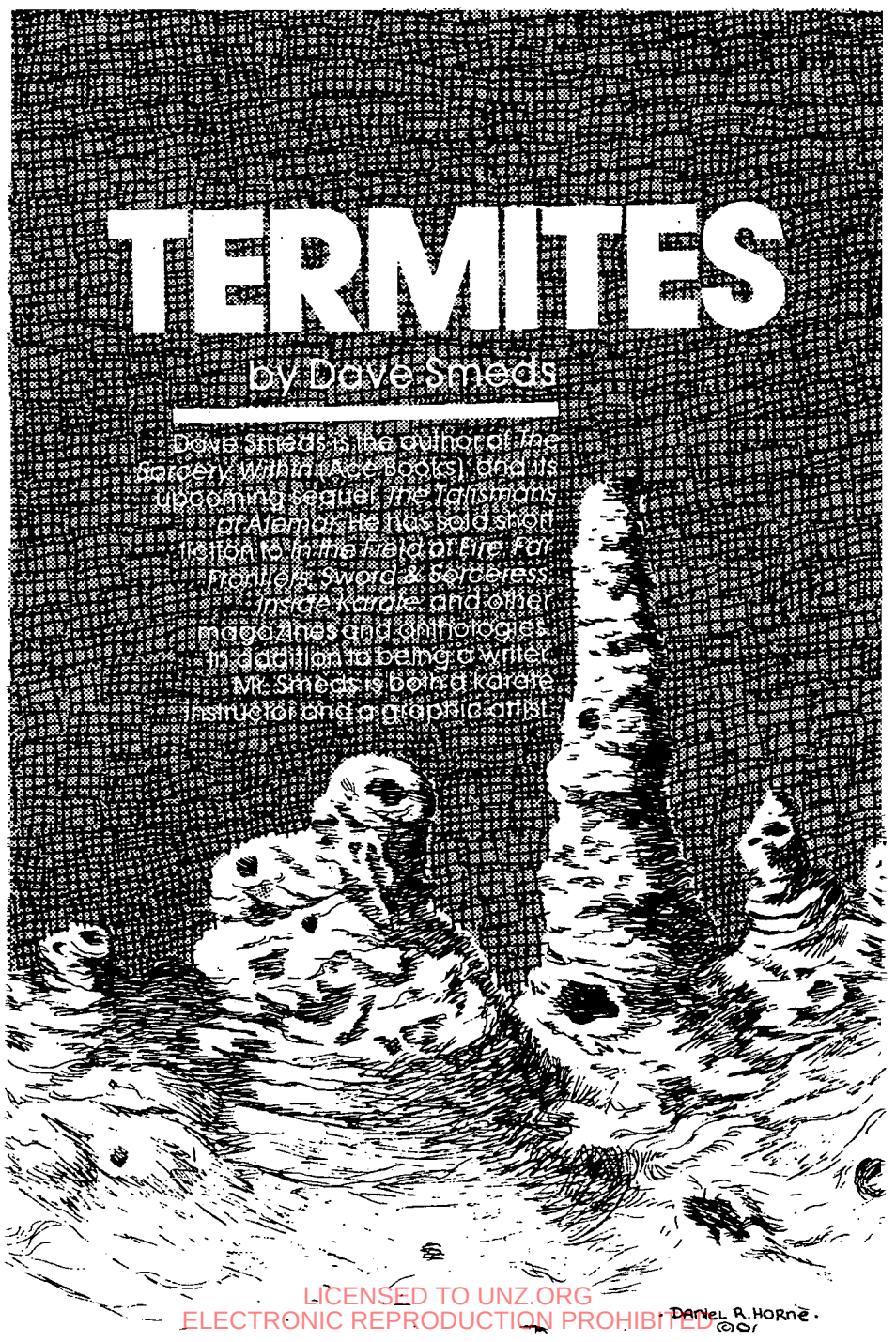
TERMITES

by Dave Smeds

Dave Smeds is the author of *The Sorcery Within* (Ace Books) and its upcoming sequel, *The Talismans of Alamar*. He has sold short fiction to *Within Reach of Fire, For Frontiers, Sword & Sorceress, Inside Karate* and other magazines and anthologies. In addition to being a writer, Mr. Smeds is both a karate instructor and a graphic artist.



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August, 2011

When I first arrived in the Cherangani Hills of northwestern Kenya as a young woman, the mountains had been green and tawny, cloaked in lush bush, dotted with the cultivated plots of the Pokot tribe that I had come to study. Now I could hardly recognize the place where I had lived my life between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-eight. The drought had turned the Great Rift Valley into blistered, lunarlike terrain; the hills reminded me of Ethiopia back in the eighties—steep mounds unintended for human habitation, withered, eroded, and above all, dry. Greg stopped the Land Rover and let me examine the scenery more carefully. But it was no use.

"I'm lost," I said.

He brushed a cloud of flies away from his face, callused fingers rasping against a four-day growth of tough, white beard. "I believe it's around the next promontory," he said, his clipped British inflections making the statement unequivocal, though in truth he knew the region far less than I.

His confidence made me try one more time. "Yes. Yes, I think you're right," I said.

When we rounded the flank of the hills, we saw the remnants of a village. All that remained of the huts were the firepits, the packed-earth floors, and ruptured holes where the branches that formed the walls had been anchored. And, of course, the sitting stones—it was improper for a man of the Pokot to sit on naked ground. In their stead were three hovels constructed of piled dung and animal hides, not true dwellings at all, merely places to get out of the sun. I saw a dozen or more people, all lying or sitting listlessly in the shade.

We felt the impact of their eyes, but aside from the stares, most of them did not react to our arrival. A single boy stood and began to approach the Land Rover. He was suffering from the early stages of marasmus, his limbs painfully thin, stomach bloated, skin hanging slack from his bones so that his face resembled that of an old man and not, so I estimated, a boy well short of puberty. His only garment was a pair of threadbare, stained khaki shorts.

Greg pulled out the .45 as we stopped rolling, keeping it in obvious view. But the boy emitted not even a flicker of belligerence; he was past those emotions. He gazed at us blankly, like a retardate. Only the fact that he had risen of his own accord gave me hope of obtaining a response from him.

"Do you know KoCherop?" I asked. I used the Pokot dialect, though the words came haltingly, with a bittersweet tang. The boy, if he had been schooled, could speak English or Swahili, but use of his home tongue might ingratiate me. "Do you know where she is?"

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He turned his prematurely old eyes toward me, and I saw, to my surprise, a mind still capable of activity and calculation. "You are Chemachugwo," he said, using my Pokot name, his voice raspy but energetic.

"Yes." I did not know him, but I was not surprised that he had guessed my identity. There were no other middle-aged white women alive who could speak his language.

"I will tell you where to find KoCherop if you give me a piece of paper," he stated.

I hesitated a moment, then reached into a compartment under the seat and withdrew the bribe. I gave him a whole sheet. The boy ran his hands over it, apparently pleased with the rough, pulpy texture and sawdust-yellow color. He rolled it into a funnel, and with his empty hand pointed to a terrace plot far up the nearest mountain. "She is there."

I could make out a tendril of smoke. I signaled Greg to drive on.

I could see the boy and his piece of paper in the side mirror for a full thirty seconds. Just before the dust and the turns in the track obscured him I saw him bite off the end of the funnel and begin to chew it. I wanted to weep, but the past few days had left me incapable of tears. It was the village, I told myself. It had been so much like the one in which I had built my hut, almost forty years back.

The road narrowed and grew more steep, until the Land Rover would go no further. We faced a dilemma, for we couldn't leave the vehicle unattended.

"I'll stay," Greg said, handing me the .45. He pulled out one of the rifles for himself.

I hadn't reckoned on this development. I needed his plucky humor and stiff upper lip. But I had gone alone into the wilderness of East Africa before. I buckled on my holster and started up the path.

Climbing these hills had been easier in younger days. I stopped often, until I could no longer bear to gaze out over the valley, where I had once watched the herdsmen and their cattle. The air became cooler, though not enough to compensate for my exertion. I estimated it would take me two hours to reach the terrace. I thought of KoCherop.

January, 1978

"Now we are like sisters," she said, touching my belly. I jumped. The tattoo was still tender from the artist's needle. She jerked back her hand. "I'm sorry."

"It's all right. I was just surprised."

"It will only hurt for a little while," she said encouragingly. "Then you will be happy because you have become more beautiful." She pointed at the spectacular, star-shaped design carved around her navel. The blood still congealed around it. "All the other girls will be jealous of me," she

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said firmly. "Now that I am a woman, I will add more all along here." She brushed her fingers up and down her midriff.

I concealed my shiver. KoCherop—she still used her childhood name, Chesinen, at that point—had a sleek body and perfect, rich brown complexion. It needed no accentuation. Along with clitoridectomy, scarification was one of the practices that tempted me to drop my anthropologist's reserve.

"Many of the girls nowadays are leaving their bellies smooth," I said.

"Those girls must be looking for Kikuyu husbands," she said with disdain. She smeared her face with red ocher and ghee, and offered to do the same for me. I accepted.

She lavished it over my nose and cheeks. "Trust me. One day a handsome man with much land will look at your belly and admire what you have had done."

I chuckled, staring down at the tattoo. I had to admit it was pretty. It was a tiny butterfly, etched in six colors of ink, excellent artistry considering that it had been performed by a traveling craftsman. In my own way, I *would* enjoy owning it; otherwise I would never have done something so permanent to my body. But it most certainly had not been done to attract a husband. I had done it for my Pokot sister, because her father had become like my own, and because she, though ten years my junior, had made me feel instantly welcome in a sea of strange black faces.

"Oh, no one will marry me," I said. "I always burn the porridge."

August, 2011 (continued)

I passed terrace after terrace of abandoned land. The farms extended far up the slope ahead of me, each family tilling parcels at not one but several elevations, the better to guard against crop failure. Some could be found as high as seven or eight thousand feet, among the peaks where, in former times, the mist would gather, moistening the land, dispelling the aridity of the Great Rift Valley. Now all I could see growing were gnarled hardwoods whose resins made them impossible to eat, or thorn thickets and brambles not worth the pain to molest. Dust crawled up my shoes and into the cuffs of my trousers.

Breathless, aching in my calves, I reached the terrace that the boy had indicated. Nothing was left of the fields but irrigation channels waiting for water that had not come. KoCherop was seated on a flat stone beside a firepit. An empty porridge kettle sat over dying coals. Beside her was a gourd of water and small sack of maize or millet.

She stared at me with wide eyes, perhaps thinking that she had died and met a ghost. I spoke her name.

She bowed her head. "I am called only Ko, now."

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"Ko" means grandmother. Her full name meant Grandmother of Daughter of Rain, which she had adopted upon the birth of her first granddaughter. It was a declaration that Cherop was dead.

KoCherop, in her typically Pokot way, did not display overt grief. It was enough to have made the statement. In a culture in which the lives of the women of the tribe revolve so deeply around those of their children that they rename themselves each time a new generation is established, no loss could have been sharper.

"I'm sorry," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. "Lokomol told me."

"He sent you, didn't he? I told him not to do that." Her voice softened. "He is well? And the little ones?"

"There is food in the refugee camp, for the moment. He wouldn't accept help. But he did beg me to come to you."

"And you have come. What will you do now?"

"Greg and I plan to take you to back to Kampala," I said. "We want you to live with us."

"I live here," she said, standing up. She had always been thin and spare; now the effect was more extreme, but the vigor—and determination—in her body was still obvious.

"What happens when that sack is empty?" I asked, pointing at her food supply. It was nearly depleted already.

She ground a toe into the dust, and dislodged a hidden stick. She tossed it in the firepit. "I am waiting for the government workers, coming to tell me that now I can eat dirt."

I started to speak, lost my momentum, paused.

"What is there for me in Kampala, Chemachugwo?" she continued. "Do they have grindstones? Can you farm there?"

"Can you farm *here?*" I found my tongue. "Do you remember the time you had the fever? I started to leave the hut one night, but you begged me not to go. Do you remember what you said?"

She faced me for the first time. "You are not fair, Janet."

"You said you didn't want to die alone. Have you changed your mind after all these years?"

The flies were devils. KoCherop, with her African composure, paid them no mind, even when they sipped fluid from the rim of her eyelids. "Lokomol should not have sent you."

"But he did." I reached out and clasped her shoulder. She leaned into my hand. "We won't have to stay in the city all the time. You can come with us when I do my field work in the Ituri forest. The pygmies will call you a giant."

KoCherop, who was rather short, smiled faintly, then lost it. I could feel her tremble through my palm. "Yes. Yes, Janet, I will come. But give me one more night. I must say goodbye to Cherop."

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I am ashamed to say that, for an instant, I did not believe her. I envisioned her hiding from us when the time came to leave. But if she did, I would have to respect that choice, so I told her where the truck was and climbed down the mountain.

February, 1988

KoCherop was giving her two-year-old son Lokomol a bath Pokot style: squirting water out of her mouth in a pencil-thin stream and scrubbing him with her fingers. The baby wailed, watching forlornly as the mud he'd so diligently splattered over his skin was rinsed away. Not far away his slightly older sister laughed at his discomforture, while KoCherop's three other children clambered up and down the acacia tree under which we sat.

"You have been married for half a year, Chemachugwo," she said. "Why aren't you pregnant?" I knew she was scolding me; she reserved use of my Pokot name for times when she wanted to lecture or argue.

I paused, keeping my glance on Lokomol, marveling at how much he had grown in the year and a half since I had last visited my tribal friends. "Greg and I don't plan to have any children just yet."

"You are over thirty years—well over. You could be a grandmother by now."

I thought of the crow's feet in the corners of my eyes and the strands of gray hair that I'd found a couple of months back. I didn't need KoCherop's reminder.

"What about you?" I asked. "Are you going to stop at five?"

"Oh, no!" she said emphatically, sending Lokomol off to his siblings with an affectionate pat on the butt. "Seven, eight, nine—whatever luck brings me. I am already behind. KamaChepkech already has six," she said of her younger sister.

KoCherop was twenty-four years old.

August, 2011 (continued)

Morning arrived with the suddenness of the tropics. I, lying awake on the bed of the Land Rover, watched the sun illuminate the tracks of the snakes that had crawled past the vehicle in the night. I heard footsteps scuffing the path and my heart began to pound.

KoCherop had come.

She had brought her sack and her gourd. She stood like a statue, her wide, Nilo-Hamitic features impassive. She was dressed in the traditional style: a skirt of thick brown muslin covering her from the base of her rib cage to her knees, huge hoop earrings, and a cornucopia of bright, multicolored beads in the form of belts, anklets, bracelets, armbands, a headband, and row after row of necklaces draping her collar, shoulders, and

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upper chest, leaving her breasts bare. This was her best outfit, and a rare sight in days when most Pokot women had long since begun to mimic Western fashions.

"When we get to Kampala, they will know I am a Pokot," she explained.

I pursed my lips. They would know, all right.

I saw her glance wistfully at the hills. "It will be temporary," I said rapidly. "The rain will come. It has to come. Lokomol and his brothers will plant new crops. You can return then."

"And maybe my granddaughter will be born again," she replied.

I sighed. It was hard not to agree with her pessimism. The rain *would* come again—no doubt far more of it than the vegetationless soil could withstand—and some of the million Pokot refugees would reestablish their homes, but for vast numbers, the old way of life had ended forever.

Greg grumbled up out of his sleep, saw KoCherop, and gave me a questioning glance.

"Start her up," I said. "There's no reason to stay here."

July, 1990

As I watched the first news broadcast concerning the Termite bacteria, I remembered Grape Nuts. In a flashback to my childhood Euell Gibbons appeared, white-haired, fatherly, pouring a bowlful of cereal. "Ever eat a pine tree?" he asked in his backwoods accent.

The geneticists explained how they had developed a strain of *E. coli* capable of converting cellulose into sugar. Doctors calculated that the effects, though disconcerting, would not be dangerous in the long term. Politicians justified its release into test populations in East Africa and Bangladesh on the grounds that it hailed the end of world hunger, a new chance for the stricken nations of the Third World.

I kept thinking of Marie Antoinette. *Let them eat wood.*

August, 2011 (continued)

We made our way to the main road, a dirt track that would take us down the valley, past Mt. Elgon to Lake Victoria, and eventually across the border into Uganda. The grimy windshield showed us a view of bleak mountains and dust, broken by an occasional cactus or bit of scrub brush.

KoCherop sat between Greg and me, taking no note of the surroundings, a contagious gloom that kept my husband and I from saying more than ten words to each other all morning. It was as if each mile enervated her, until it was all she could do to simply sit.

We approached Sigor, the district's marketing center, the only "big town" KoCherop had ever visited. It was little more than a collection of dung huts with tin sheet roofs. Nowhere on the wind-whipped ground was there a tree or a blade of grass, only dust, rusting oil drums, black

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requiem birds, a scent of human poverty. In temperate climates, poverty smells sour, but in hot regions it is sickeningly sweet. Small knots of people gathered at the periphery of the street as we rolled through: sad black faces, pleading eyes.

We kept our weapons visible, but here, as with the boy the day before, no one had the energy to threaten us. They simply stood with the passivity of the starving, hoping that perhaps we were famine relief workers. I did not look at their faces. Though we had an ample supply of food in the Land Rover, we didn't dare stop and try to share it, or the spell holding them back would have been broken. Our food stayed hidden inside plastic, metal, and canvas, as inconspicuous as we could make it.

I couldn't save them. There were too many. What mattered now was KoCherop. I could, God willing, rescue one person, if she would let me.

She paid no attention to the audience, though they stared at her beads and naked breasts, which in their minds marked her as more primitive, and therefore poorer, than they. Perhaps they were wondering why she, and not they, deserved to ride. We didn't stop until long after the village had merged with the dust of the horizon.

February, 1992

"You don't have to do that anymore," I said.

KoCherop continued picking bits of stems and stalks out of the sorghum she was grinding. She looked at me with skepticism.

"You don't have to separate the chaff," I clarified. "Just grind it in. The bacteria will allow you to digest it, just like the grain."

"It is meant for cattle, not people," she said firmly. "You talk like the government workers."

"The crop's been very poor this year. You don't have much to waste."

"Do they eat chaff in California?" she asked. She knew that I had just returned from a visit to my hometown in the San Joaquin Valley.

"No. North America hasn't been infected yet. But it will be. There's no way to stop *E. coli*. Eventually it'll get everyone. We'll all be Termites. I'm one already. So are you."

"No, I am not."

"Yes, you are. It's even gotten into your cattle. That's why the dung burns so poorly," I said, pointing at the smoldering fire underneath the kettle of porridge. There wasn't enough fiber left in the cow pies to serve as fuel. "Don't tell me you haven't noticed a big difference in how food passes through your system."

Not being Caucasian, her blush didn't show, but the expression was the same. I, too, had been embarrassed by the sudden, violent cycles of diarrhea and constipation, and most of all by the methane, though more recently my body had begun to adjust.

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"I will keep doing it this way," she insisted. "This is the way my mother taught me."

August, 2011 (continued)

We began to catch up with the refugee caravans by midafternoon. The first contained about fifty people, shuffling along at a pace of perhaps a kilometer an hour. It was much worse than in Sigor, for they made no effort to get out of the way of the Land Rover—many, I suspected, would not have cared if they had been run over—and it took a considerable length of time to weave our way through them, all the while aware of their eyes an arm-length outside the windows. Their lighter coloring and thinner features told me that they were Samburu. They had come even further than we, from the vicinity of Lake Turkana, where the normally bountiful supplies of fish had become exhausted from the excessive demand.

At least they were away from the water and its mosquitoes. Fewer would die from malaria.

In due course we came upon another, somewhat larger group, readily distinguishable because some of them still carried significant possessions, either in carts, on packs, or slung on poles. They even drove a pair of oxen and a few bony cows ahead of them. I noticed four men huddled around a bowl of milk and blood, a traditional meal of the pastoralists of the Rift Valley, while a knot of women and children watched, quiet with envy. My hands, lubed with perspiration, slid along the stock of my rifle. Greg gave me a glance, and I knew he saw what I did: these tribesmen had enough strength left to cause trouble should they wish.

Three young men, painfully lean but still muscular, were very slow to get out of our path. They glowered at us as we passed. I pretended to be distracted by the constant bouncing from the ruts and chuck holes, but I could feel their eyes riveted to us. It was like the sensation a woman gets when a man blatantly undresses his in her mind.

The last obstacle was a boy who strode behind one of the oxen with a thin whip. For a full two minutes, though it was obvious he knew we were behind him, he refused to move himself or his animal out of the way. Finally the track widened and Greg began to pull around. Suddenly the boy began lashing at us. The sound of leather on metal made me jump. The boy shouted—a guttural, wordless roar. The tip of his lash struck the steering wheel.

Greg stepped firmly on the throttle, shooting us into the clear, and didn't let up until the irregularity of the road shook us more than our aging bones could tolerate. He eased off, put the .45 back into its holster on the dash, got out his handkerchief, and wiped his forehead. The boy,

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his image shrinking out of sight in the mirror, was laughing that his whip had spurred us so well. His poor ox could not have been so vigorous.

"Bloody little blighter," Greg cursed.

My hands were shaking. I turned to share a sigh of relief with KoCherop, only to find her gazing ahead, lips pursed, as if nothing of importance had occurred. Greg noticed and, like me, his eyebrows drew together.

Ahead in the distance, well away from the Samburu, an escarpment loomed. "We'll pull over when we reach that," Greg announced, pointing. "Time for a rest."

September, 2001

We were walking down a trail between two plots of farmland, one belonging to KoCherop's uncle, the other to her brother. For once, the rain had come in full vigor, and neither locusts nor the flocks of marauding queleas had come to steal the grain. Dozens of tribesmen worked the fields, the glistening brown backs of both men and women happily bending down to harvest a bumper crop.

"Why do you do what you do?" KoCherop asked suddenly.

The question had come from out of the blue. "You mean, why am I an anthropologist?"

She nodded. "See my people with their scythes? See this mountain? I am in my place. Why do you live so far from your parents? Why do you go to the forest to study the pygmies, instead of having children? You are too old now to start a family. How can you be happy?"

There were occasional times, as menopause approached and I wondered what would have happened if I had married my college sweetheart and stayed in the United States, that I wasn't totally content with the alternative I'd chosen. But I was able to answer KoCherop honestly. "I do what I do because I want to. My work fulfills me."

She shook her head, mystified. "I could never be like that. Take me from my clan and this dirt and I would die."

August, 2011 (continued)

We stopped in the shade of the escarpment, where we were relatively inconspicuous but nevertheless had an unobstructed view of the road. Greg got out quickly, looked toward the rear of the truck, and groaned.

"I thought that last mile was a mite rough," he said. I walked around to his side, and saw that we had a flat tire.

"A gift from the Samburu?" I suggested.

"Could be. Most likely the frigging road." He opened up the rear of the Land Rover. "Last spare," he said, which we both knew already. I checked

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the map to measure the distance to Lake Victoria, and gnawed at my inner lip.

I began to help him, but he convinced me to relax, and in exchange I would drive the remaining short leg until sundown. KoCherop and I found a relatively comfortable spot in the talus a few yards away, where I spread out the last of our fresh fruit, as well as bread and, most important of all, a jug of water. The flies were overjoyed at the repast.

KoCherop ate a piece of fruit, a treat even in good seasons and a part of her diet of which she had surely been totally deprived lately, drank her fill, and turned to look at the plain.

"Have more," I said.

She didn't answer. Occasionally her glance would dart toward the north, where we had now left the last of the Pokot lands behind. She began taking apart her headband, running the beads off the ends of their threads one by one and flicking them away.

I am ashamed to confess that my own appetite was ravenous, and when I was certain my friend was not going to touch another bite, I saw to it that the ants had nothing more than stems and gleaned rinds to attack. The sand at the edge of the talus was now vivid with specks of color, an inadvertent piece of artwork created by KoCherop's cast-off beads, each one a particle of the life she knew, gone. I made sure not to disturb it as I walked back to check on Greg.

He was cinching the last nut. I handed him his canteen. He drained it. "Next time we bring a chauffeur," he joked, slightly breathless.

"We're losing her," I told him. "She's just waiting until the wind calls her name and takes her away."

He stowed the tire iron. "Well," he murmured, "the choice is hers now, isn't it? You can't make it for her."

The words seemed callous, but I had no answer for them at the time. KoCherop was waiting for the world to conform to her desires, not unlike the scientists who had created the Termite bacteria. But the world has ways of turning the tables back around. Now it was man's, and KoCherop's, turn to adapt, and she was refusing.

Brooding, I assisted Greg in lifting the flat tire into the Land Rover. The winds of upper Kenya had arrived with their usual vigor, hurrying us toward the next leg of our journey.

March, 2007

We were walking along the bank of a river. The drought had been severe for three years, and now the watercourse contained only sand, pocked with pits where the tribespeople had dug to reach the watertable. Now even those holes were desiccated. Thirty years before, when I had

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still lived here, the river had been lined with grass and overhung by broad, leafy acacias. Now even the stumps were gone.

Ironically, it was the industrialized nations that had benefited from the modified *E. coli*. The sugar industry no longer had to boil away nintey percent of the raw cane during refining. Grains no longer had to be as thoroughly processed. But in the Third World bureaucrats became dangerously lax in educating the people about the need for population control, and the added demand for wood exacerbated the already severe deforestation problem. The climate had rebelled.

Cherop, the granddaughter for whom my friend had been renamed, skipped along ahead of us, always alert for a sunning lizard or a pretty stone. We were solemn in spite of the child's exuberance. KoCherop's husband had died two months before. This was my first visit since that event, and our conversation had awakened some of KoCherop's sense of loss. Now we just walked, thinking about the changes brought by time. It was young Cherop who broke the silence.

"Look!" she cried, pointing. Not far off the path, partially hidden in a thorn bramble, stood a termite mound.

Assured that we were watching, she ran over to it and began climbing. The mound was nearly three times as tall as she, rising into a dozen eroded towers. A hyena or aardwolf had dug a burrow at its base; birds had done the same, on a smaller scale, in its heights. The termites themselves had abandoned the site. Cherop explored the structure as much as the thorns would allow, no doubt hoping that one of the nests would still contain something interesting.

I smiled. The girl gave me a big, toothless grin, breaking off a small projection to demonstrate her strength, offering the dust to the wind.

I turned to KoCherop, and stage by stage my smile faded. I had never seen such a bitter look on her face.

"What's wrong?"

"I wish that all the termites had died ten thousand years ago. Then maybe your people would never have thought of a way to make us like insects."

It felt like I had been stung. The worst part of it was that she seemed unaware that she was hurting me. I could not avoid blurting out a response.

"Maybe if your people had stopped having so many babies, my people wouldn't have tried to solve your problems."

August, 2011 (continued)

We reached an armed checkpoint shortly before dusk. An overweight minor officer, skin so oily it gleamed, examined our papers with a frown, peering repeatedly at our vehicle's contents. He spared KoCherop a dis-

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interested glance, mostly toward her breasts. Greg bribed him with two packs of American cigarettes and we were on our way. "Wish it could be that easy at the border," said my husband. We camped not far down the road, reasoning that bandits might be discouraged by the proximity of the checkpoint.

It was crowded in the back of the Land Rover. I slept between Greg and KoCherop, listening to the wind moan and the crickets trill, unable to sleep. KoCherop's scent evoked memories. It is strange that an entire tribe can have an identifiable essence. When I had lived with them year round I had become oblivious to it.

I thought about the city, trying to picture KoCherop walking to the supermarket, wearing a cotton smock, smelling the civilized odors of cement and auto exhaust. What kind of fool was I to think that, simply because I loved her, I could succeed in transferring a human being from her culture into mine?

Greg woke and crawled out of the vehicle. Soon I heard the muffled, rain-on-the-roof sound of urine splattering dust. I glanced at KoCherop. Even in the dim illumination I could see the determined, stubborn tension in her shoulders, and I became angry.

"Damn it," I murmured. "What more do you want me to do? *It's not my fault.*"

She didn't stir, but something in the stillness of her breathing hinted that she was awake. But after Greg returned and began snoring, I convinced myself that I had imagined it.

In the distance, I was certain I heard a hyena laughing, like a ghost of Africa of old.

July, 2011

The refugee camp was a sea of humanity. Our guide was a young doctor who, judging from his haggard cheeks and the red in his eyes, had not slept in four days. Somehow he kept his humor as we threaded through the crowd from checkpoint to checkpoint, trying to find Lokomol and the rest of KoCherop's family.

A little girl, bloated with kwashiorkor, stared at me as I passed. I turned away—from her and from all the faces, keeping my glance on the doctor. Here and there sat a lucky family with a tent or blanket to shade themselves; for the most part the refugees simply lay on the packed ground beneath an open sky, waiting until the next shipment of food arrived at the distribution point, or until the doctors received a fresh supply of basic medicines.

Some attempt had been made to funnel members of various tribal groups into specific areas of the camp. Otherwise we might never have found Lokomol.

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He was sitting with his youngest daughter propped in his lap. I spotted him immediately; his lean features and long fingers closely resembled his mother. He was, much to my relief, apparently in good health.

"We came as soon as we got your message," I said. "We've arranged for transportation to take you to the camp near Kampala. It's much better supplied than this one."

"You have always been good to us, Chemachugwo," he answered pensively. "But it is for my mother that I sent for you."

"Why isn't she with you?"

He shrugged.

Knowing KoCherop, I understood completely. "You want me to try to bring her?"

He nodded. "I am ashamed to ask this of you, but you are the only person I have ever known who can make my mother listen."

August, 2011 (continued)

"Wake up, Janet."

It was Greg's voice, coming from the other end of a long tunnel. I peeled my eyes open. The morning light was unforgivably bright.

"Time for breakfast," Greg said for the second time. "I want to get to the border well before dusk."

I moaned, rubbed the grit from my lashes, and went about the meal like a zombie, hoping that my headache would soon go away. KoCherop sat nearby. I noticed that she ate a full share this time, but otherwise I avoided paying much attention to her. The border crossing was enough to think about, I told myself.

"You are sad, Janet," KoCherop said during a moment when Greg was out of hearing range.

"That's true," I replied, and turned to clean my bowl.

"Janet?"

"Yes?"

"I am sorry."

I looked at her, frowned, and climbed into the Land Rover. I was sorry, too, but what good was that? I didn't answer her. She had nothing to add, and we didn't speak for the rest of the morning.

By noon we began to see grass and brush. The air closed in, a sign of humidity. Greg spotted a flamingo in flight. Suddenly we crested a hill and saw Lake Victoria sprawling into the distance.

KoCherop's eyes went wide. It was easy to understand why.

"Where is the other side?" she whispered.

The shore to which she referred was over two hundred miles away, lost over the horizon. The lake was so vast that it could generate its own

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climate, moistening the adjacent countryside that would otherwise have been as arid as the region from which we had emerged.

It was one more new thing to overwhelm her, I thought bitterly.

KoCherop stared at the lake for almost an hour, while I stayed locked in my own preoccupations. She startled me when she called for us to stop.

"I want to look at that," she said.

We had reached a particularly good vantage point from which to view the lake. KoCherop got out of the vehicle and walked to the edge of the road. Just in front of her the land dropped off abruptly. I could see jagged rocks down below. My friend stood where one more step would send her tumbling over the edge. Suddenly my insides clenched.

"Greg!" I cried.

"Give her a moment," he said in a voice that struck me as far too calm.

I held my breath, prepared at any time to shut my eyes and cover my ears. Again Greg, though observing carefully, seemed much too unruffled. Then, bit by bit, I began to see it as he did.

Her posture was no longer stiff. She stared at the lake not as if overwhelmed or contemplating suicide, but as I had the first time I had seen this, the second largest body of fresh water in the world—with awe and delight. I realized then that her demeanor had been different all day, but I, in my melancholy, had failed to notice.

She turned and walked toward me, her back straight, her eyes bright.

"Will I have my own room in Kampala?" she asked.

I felt a smile tugging at my lips. This was the KoCherop I had once known, someone with hope for the years to come. "Yes," I replied. "A big one."

"Good," she said crisply, and climbed into the Land Rover. I thought back to the beads she had cast away the previous day. Not particles of life, thrown away in order to embrace Death, but bits of the past, dropped by the wayside to make room for the future. KoCherop was willing to adapt. The tightness in my throat melted away.

"Let's go home," I told Greg. ●

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by Pat Cadigan

ANGEL

art: J. K. Potter

The author's first novel, *Mindplayers*, is due out from Bantam sometime this fall. It is based on her Pathosfinder stories—one of which, "Nearly Departed," appeared in our June 1983 issue.

Stand with me awhile, Angel, I said, and Angel said he'd do that. Angel was good to me that way, good to have with you on a cold night and nowhere to go. We stood on the street corner together and watched the cars going by and the people and all. The streets were lit up like Christmas, streetlights, store lights, marquees over the all-night movie houses and bookstores blinking and flashing; shank of the evening in east midtown. Angel was getting used to things here and getting used to how I did, nights. Standing outside, because what else are you going

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to do. He was *my* Angel now, had been since that other cold night when I'd been going home, because where are you going to go, and I'd found him and took him with me. It's good to have someone to take with you, someone to look after. Angel knew that. He started looking after me, too.

Like now. We were standing there awhile and I was looking around at nothing and everything, the cars cruising past, some of them stopping now and again for the hookers posing by the curb, and then I saw it, out of the corner of my eye. Stuff coming out of the Angel, shiny like sparks but flowing like liquid. Silver fireworks. I turned and looked all the way at him and it was gone. And he turned and gave a little grin like he was embarrassed I'd seen. Nobody else saw it, though; not the short guy who paused next to the Angel before crossing the street against the light, not the skinny hype looking to sell the boom-box he was carrying on his shoulder, not the homeboy strutting past us with both his girlfriends on his arms, nobody but me.

The Angel said, Hungry?

Sure, I said. I'm hungry.

Angel looked past me. Okay, he said. I looked, too, and here they came, three leather boys, visor caps, belts, boots, keyrings. On the cruise together. Scary stuff, even though you know it's not looking for you.

I said, them? *Them?*

Angel didn't answer. One went by, then the second, and the Angel stopped the third by taking hold of his arm.

Hi.

The guy nodded. His head was shaved. I could see a little grey-black stubble under his cap. No eyebrows, disinterested eyes. The eyes were because of the Angel.

I could use a little money, the Angel said. My friend and I are hungry.

The guy put his hand in his pocket and wiggled out some bills, offering them to the Angel. The Angel selected a twenty and closed the guy's hand around the rest.

This will be enough, thank you.

The guy put his money away and waited.

I hope you have a good night, said the Angel.

The guy nodded and walked on, going across the street to where his two friends were waiting on the next corner. Nobody found anything weird about it.

Angel was grinning at me. Sometimes he was *the* Angel, when he was doing something, sometimes he was Angel, when he was just with me. Now he was Angel again. We went up the street to the luncheonette and got a seat by the front window so we could still watch the street while we ate.

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Cheeseburger and fries, I said without bothering to look at the plastic-covered menus lying on top of the napkin holder. The Angel nodded.

Thought so, he said. I'll have the same, then.

The waitress came over with a little tiny pad to take our order. I cleared my throat. It seemed like I hadn't used my voice in a hundred years. "Two cheeseburgers and two fries," I said, "and two cups of—" I looked up at her and froze. She had no face. Like, *nothing*, blank from hairline to chin, soft little dents where the eyes and nose and mouth would have been. Under the table, the Angel kicked me, but gentle.

"And two cups of coffee," I said.

She didn't say anything—how could she?—as she wrote down the order and then walked away again. All shaken up, I looked at the Angel, but he was calm like always.

She's a new arrival, Angel told me and leaned back in his chair. Not enough time to grow a face.

But how can she breathe? I said.

Through her pores. She doesn't need much air yet.

Yah, but what about—like, I mean, don't other people *notice* that she's got nothing there?

No. It's not such an extraordinary condition. The only reason you notice is because you're with me. Certain things have rubbed off on you. But no one else notices. When they look at her, they see whatever face they expect someone like her to have. And eventually, she'll have it.

But you have a face, I said. You've always had a face.

I'm different, said the Angel.

You sure are, I thought, looking at him. Angel had a beautiful face. That wasn't why I took him home that night, just because he had a beautiful face—I left all that behind a long time ago—but it was there, his beauty. The way you think of a man being beautiful, good clean lines, deep-set eyes, ageless. About the only way you could describe him—look away and you'd forget everything except that he was beautiful. But he did have a face. He *did*.

Angel shifted in the chair—these were like somebody's old kitchen chairs, you couldn't get too comfortable in them—and shook his head, because he knew I was thinking troubled thoughts. Sometimes you could think something and it wouldn't be troubled and later you'd think the same thing and it would be troubled. The Angel didn't like me to be troubled about him.

Do you have a cigarette? he asked.

I think so.

I patted my jacket and came up with most of a pack that I handed over to him. The Angel lit up and amused us both by having the smoke come out his ears and trickle out of his eyes like ghostly tears. I felt my own

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eyes watering for his; I wiped them and there was that *stuff* again, but from me now. I was crying silver fireworks. I flicked them on the table and watched them puff out and vanish.

Does this mean I'm getting to *be* you, now? I asked.

Angel shook his head. Smoke wafted out of his hair. Just things rubbing off on you. Because we've been together and you're—susceptible. But they're different for you.

Then the waitress brought our food and we went on to another sequence, as the Angel would say. She still had no face but I guess she could see well enough because she put all the plates down just where you'd think they were supposed to go and left the tiny little check in the middle of the table.

Is she—I mean, did you know her, from where you—

Angel gave his head a brief little shake. No. She's from somewhere else. Not one of my—people. He pushed the cheeseburger and fries in front of him over to my side of the table. That was the way it was done; I did all the eating and somehow it worked out.

I picked up my cheeseburger and I was bringing it up to my mouth when my eyes got all funny and I saw it coming up like a whole *series* of cheeseburgers, whoom-whoom-whoom, trick photography, only for real. I closed my eyes and jammed the cheeseburger into my mouth, holding it there, waiting for all the other cheeseburgers to catch up with it.

You'll be okay, said the Angel. Steady, now.

I said with my mouth full, That was—that was *weird.* Will I ever get used to this?

I doubt it. But I'll do what I can to help you.

Yah, well, the Angel *would* know. Stuff rubbing off on me, he could feel it better than I could. He was the one it was rubbing off *from.*

I had put away my cheeseburger and half of Angel's and was working on the french fries for both of us when I noticed he was looking out the window with this hard, tight expression on his face.

Something? I asked him.

Keep eating, he said.

I kept eating, but I kept watching, too. The Angel was staring at a big blue car parked at the curb right outside the diner. It was silvery blue, one of those lots-of-money models and there was a woman kind of leaning across from the driver's side to look out the passenger window. She was beautiful in that lots-of-money way, tawny hair swept back from her face, and even from here I could see she had turquoise eyes. Really beautiful woman. I almost felt like crying. I mean, jeez, how did people get that way and me too harmless to live.

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But the Angel wasn't one bit glad to see her. I knew he didn't want me to say anything, but I couldn't help it.

Who is she?

Keep eating, Angel said. We need the protein, what little there is.

I ate and watched the woman and the Angel watch each other and it was getting very—I don't know, very *something* between them, even through the glass. Then a cop car pulled up next to her and I knew they were telling her to move it along. She moved it along.

Angel sagged against the back of his chair and lit another cigarette, smoking it in the regular, unremarkable way.

What are we going to do tonight? I asked the Angel as we left the restaurant.

Keep out of harm's way, Angel said, which was a new answer. Most nights we spent just kind of going around soaking everything up. The Angel soaked it up, mostly. I got some of it along with him, but not the same way he did. It was different for him. Sometimes he would use me like a kind of filter. Other times he took it direct. There'd been the big car accident one night, right at my usual corner, a big old Buick running a red light smack into somebody's nice Lincoln. The Angel had had to take it direct because I couldn't handle that kind of stuff. I didn't know how the Angel could take it, but he could. It carried him for days afterwards, too. I only had to eat for myself.

It's the intensity, little friend, he'd told me, as though that were supposed to explain it.

It's the intensity, not whether it's good or bad. The universe doesn't know good or bad, only less or more. Most of you have a bad time reconciling this. *You* have a bad time with it, little friend, but you get through better than other people. Maybe because of the way you are. You got squeezed out of a lot, you haven't had much of a chance at life. You're as much an exile as I am, only in your own land.

That may have been true, but at least I *belonged* here, so that part was easier for me. But I didn't say that to the Angel. I think he liked to think he could do as well or better than me at living—I mean, I couldn't just look at some leather boy and get him to cough up a twenty dollar bill. Cough up a fist in the face or worse, was more like it.

Tonight, though, he wasn't doing so good, and it was that woman in the car. She'd thrown him out of step, kind of.

Don't think about her, the Angel said, just out of nowhere. Don't think about her any more.

Okay, I said, feeling creepy because it was creepy when the Angel got a glimpse of my head. And then, of course, I couldn't think about anything else hardly.

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Do you want to go home? I asked him.

No. I can't stay in now. We'll do the best we can tonight, but I'll have to be very careful about the tricks. They take so much out of me, and if we're keeping out of harm's way, I might not be able to make up for a lot of it.

It's okay, I said. I ate. I don't need anything else tonight, you don't have to do any more.

Angel got that look on his face, the one where I knew he wanted to give me things, like feelings I couldn't have any more. Generous, the Angel was. But I didn't need those feelings, not like other people seem to. For awhile, it was like the Angel didn't understand that, but he let me be.

Little friend, he said, and almost touched me. The Angel didn't touch a lot. I could touch him and that would be okay, but if *he* touched somebody, he couldn't help *doing* something to them, like the trade that had given us the money. That had been deliberate. If the trade had touched the Angel first, it would have been different, nothing would have happened unless the Angel touched him back. All touch meant something to the Angel that I didn't understand. There was touching without touching, too. Like things rubbing off on me. And sometimes, when I did touch the Angel, I'd get the feeling that it was maybe more his idea than mine, but I didn't mind that. How many people were going their whole lives never being able to touch an Angel?

We walked together and all around us the street was really coming to life. It was getting colder, too. I tried to make my jacket cover more. The Angel wasn't feeling it. Most of the time hot and cold didn't mean much to him. We saw the three rough trade guys again. The one Angel had gotten the money from was getting into a car. The other two watched it drive away and then walked on. I looked over at the Angel.

Because we took his twenty, I said.

Even if we hadn't, Angel said.

So we went along, the Angel and me, and I could feel how different it was tonight than it was all the other nights we'd walked or stood together. The Angel was kind of pulled back into himself and seemed to be keeping a check on me, pushing us closer together. I was getting more of those fireworks out of the corners of my eyes, but when I'd turn my head to look, they'd vanish. It reminded me of the night I'd found the Angel standing on my corner all by himself in pain. The Angel told me later that was real talent, knowing he was in pain. I never thought of myself as any too talented, but the way everyone else had been just ignoring him, I guess I must have had something to see him after all.

The Angel stopped us several feet down from an all-night bookstore.

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Don't look, he said. Watch the traffic or stare at your feet, but don't look or it won't happen.

There wasn't anything to see right then, but I didn't look anyway. That was the way it was sometimes, the Angel telling me it made a difference whether I was watching something or not, something about the other people being conscious of me being conscious of them. I didn't understand, but I knew Angel was usually right. So I was watching traffic when the guy came out of the bookstore and got his head punched.

I could almost see it out of the corner of my eye. A lot of movement, arms and legs flying and grunty noises. Other people stopped to look but I kept my eyes on the traffic, some of which was slowing up so they could check out the fight. Next to me, the Angel was stiff all over. Taking it in, what he called the expenditure of emotional kinetic energy. No right, no wrong, little friend, he'd told me. Just energy, like the rest of the universe.

So he took it in and I *felt* him taking it in, and while I was feeling it, a kind of silver fog started creeping around my eyeballs and I was in two places at once. I was watching the traffic and I was in the Angel watching the fight and feeling him charge up like a big battery.

It felt like nothing I'd ever felt before. These two guys slugging it out—well, one guy doing all the slugging and the other skittering around trying to get out from under the fists and having his head punched but good, and the Angel drinking it like he was sipping at an empty cup and somehow getting it to have something in it after all. Deep inside him, whatever made the Angel go was getting a little stronger.

I kind of swung back and forth between him and me, or swayed might be more like it was. I wondered about it, because the Angel wasn't touching me. I really was getting to *be* him, I thought; Angel picked that up and put the thought away to answer later. It was like I was traveling by the fog, being one of us and then the other, for a long time, it seemed, and then after awhile I was more me than him again, and some of the fog cleared away.

And there was that car, pointed the other way this time, and the woman was climbing out of it with this big weird smile on her face, as though she'd won something. She waved at the Angel to come to her.

Bang went the connection between us dead and the Angel shot past me, running away from the car. I went after him. I caught a glimpse of her jumping back into the car and yanking at the gear shift.

Angel wasn't much of a runner. Something funny about his knees. We'd gone maybe a hundred feet when he started wobbling and I could hear him pant. He cut across a Park.& Lock that was dark and mostly empty. It was back-to-back with some kind of private parking lot and the fences for each one tried to mark off the same narrow strip of lumpy

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pavement. They were easy to climb but Angel was too panicked. He just *went* through them before he even thought about it; I knew that because if he'd been thinking, he'd have wanted to save what he'd just charged up with for when he really needed it bad enough.

I had to haul myself over the fences in the usual way, and when he heard me rattling on the saggy chainlink, he stopped and looked back.

Go, I told him. Don't wait on me!

He shook his head sadly. Little friend, I'm a fool. I could stand to learn from you a little more.

Don't stand, run! I got over the fences and caught up with him. Let's go! I yanked his sleeve as I slogged past and he followed at a clumsy trot.

Have to hide somewhere, he said, camouflage ourselves with people.

I shook my head, thinking we could just run maybe four more blocks and we'd be at the freeway overpass. Below it were the butt-ends of old roads closed off when the freeway had been built. You could hide there the rest of your life and no one would find you. But Angel made me turn right and go down a block to this rundown crack-in-the-wall called Stan's Jigger. I'd never been in there—I'd never made it a practice to go into bars—but the Angel was pushing too hard to argue.

Inside it was smelly and dark and not too happy. The Angel and I went down to the end of the bar and stood under a blood-red light while he searched his pockets for money.

Enough for one drink apiece, he said.

I don't want anything.

You can have soda or something.

The Angel ordered from the bartender, who was suspicious. This was a place for regulars and nobody else, and certainly nobody else like me or the Angel. The Angel knew that even stronger than I did but he just stood and pretended to sip his drink without looking at me. He was all pulled into himself and I was hovering around the edges. I knew he was still pretty panicked and trying to figure out what he could do next. As close as I was, if he had to get real far away, he was going to have a problem and so was I. He'd have to tow me along with him and that wasn't the most practical thing to do.

Maybe he was sorry now he'd let me take him home. But he'd been so weak then, and now with all the filtering and stuff I'd done for him he couldn't just cut me off without a lot of pain.

I was trying to figure out what I could do for him now when the bartender came back and gave us a look that meant order or get out, and he'd have liked it better if we got out. So would everyone else there. The few other people standing at the bar weren't looking at us, but they knew right where we were, like a sore spot. It wasn't hard to figure out

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what they thought about us, either, maybe because of me or because of the Angel's beautiful face.

We got to leave, I said to the Angel but he had it in his head this was good camouflage. There wasn't enough money for two more drinks so he smiled at the bartender and slid his hand across the bar and put it on top of the bartender's. It was tricky doing it this way; bartenders and waitresses took more persuading because it wasn't normal for them just to give you something.

The bartender looked at the Angel with his eyes half closed. He seemed to be thinking it over. But the Angel had just blown a lot going through the fence instead of climbing over it and the fear was scuttling his concentration and I just knew that it wouldn't work. And maybe my knowing that didn't help, either.

The bartender's free hand dipped down below the bar and came up with a small club. "Faggot!" he roared and caught Angel just over the ear. Angel slammed into me and we both crashed to the floor. Plenty of emotional kinetic energy in here, I thought dimly as the guys standing at the bar fell on us, and then I didn't think anything more as I curled up into a ball under their fists and boots.

We were lucky they didn't much feel like killing anyone. Angel went out the door first and they tossed me out on top of him. As soon as I landed on him, I knew we were both in trouble; something was broken inside him. So much for keeping out of harm's way. I rolled off him and lay on the pavement, staring at the sky and trying to catch my breath. There was blood in my mouth and my nose, and my back was on fire.

Angel? I said, after a bit.

He didn't answer. I felt my mind get kind of all loose and runny, like my brains were leaking out my ears. I thought about the trade we'd taken the money from and how I'd been scared of him and his friends and how silly that had been. But then, I was too harmless to live.

The stars were raining silver fireworks down on me. It didn't help.

Angel? I said again.

I rolled over onto my side to reach for him, and there she was. The car was parked at the curb and she had Angel under the armpits, dragging him toward the open passenger door. I couldn't tell if he was conscious or not and that scared me. I sat up.

She paused, still holding the Angel. We looked into each other's eyes, and I started to understand.

"Help me get him into the car," she said at last. Her voice sounded hard and flat and unnatural. "Then you can get in, too. In the *back* seat."

I was in no shape to take her out. It couldn't have been better for her if she'd set it up herself. I got up, the pain flaring in me so bad that I almost fell down again, and took the Angel's ankles. His ankles were so

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delicate, almost like a woman's, like *hers*. I didn't really help much, except to guide his feet in as she sat him on the seat and strapped him in with the shoulder harness. I got in the back as she ran around to the other side of the car, her steps real light and peppy, like she'd found a million dollars lying there on the sidewalk.

We were out on the freeway before the Angel stirred in the shoulder harness. His head lolled from side to side on the back of the seat. I reached up and touched his hair lightly, hoping she couldn't see me do it.

Where are you taking me, the Angel said.

"For a ride," said the woman. "For the moment."

Why does she talk out loud like that? I asked the Angel.

Because she knows it bothers me.

"You know I can focus my thoughts better if I say things out loud," she said. "I'm not like one of your little pushovers." She glanced at me in the rear view mirror. "Just *what* have you gotten yourself into since you left, darling? Is that a boy or a girl?"

I pretended I didn't care about what she said or that I was too harmless to live or any of that stuff, but the way she said it, she meant it to sting.

Friends can be either, Angel said. It doesn't matter which. Where are you taking us?

Now it was *us*. In spite of everything, I almost could have smiled.

"Us? You mean, you and me? Or are you really referring to your little pet back there?"

My friend and I are together. You and I are *not*.

The way the Angel said it made me think he meant more than not together; like he'd been with her once the way he was with me now. The Angel let me know I was right. Silver fireworks started flowing slowly off his head down the back of the seat and I knew there was something wrong about it. There was too much all at once.

"Why can't you talk out loud to me, darling?" the woman said with fakey-sounding petulance. "Just say a few words and make me happy. You have a lovely voice when you use it."

That was true, but the Angel never spoke out loud unless he couldn't get out of it, like when he'd ordered from the bartender. Which had probably helped the bartender decide about what he thought we were, but it was useless to think about that.

"All right," said Angel, and I knew the strain was awful for him. "I've said a few words. Are you happy?" He sagged in the shoulder harness.

"Ecstatic. But it won't make me let you go. I'll drop your pet at the nearest hospital and then we'll go home." She glanced at the Angel as she drove. "I've missed you so much. I can't *stand* it without you, without you making things happen. Doing your little miracles. You knew I'd get

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addicted to it, all the things you could do to people. And then you just took off, I didn't know what had happened to you. And it *hurt.*" Her voice turned kind of pitiful, like a little kid's. "I was in real *pain.* You must have been, too. Weren't you? Well, *weren't you*?"

Yes, the Angel said. I was in pain, too.

I remembered him standing on my corner, where I'd hung out all that time by myself until he came. Standing there in pain. I didn't know why or from what then, I just took him home, and after a little while, the pain went away. When he decided we were together, I guess.

The silvery flow over the back of the car seat thickened. I cupped my hands under it and it was like my brain was lighting up with pictures. I saw the Angel before he was my Angel, in this really nice house, the woman's house, and how she'd take him places, restaurants or stores or parties, thinking at him real hard so that he was all filled up with her and had to do what she wanted him to. Steal sometimes; other times, weird stuff, make people do silly things like suddenly start singing or taking their clothes off. That was mostly at the parties, though she made a waiter she didn't like burn himself with a pot of coffee. She'd get men, too, through the Angel, and they'd think it was the greatest idea in the world to go to bed with her. Then she'd make the Angel show her the others, the ones that had been sent here the way he had for crimes nobody could have understood, like the waitress with no face. She'd look at them, sometimes try to do things to them to make them uncomfortable or unhappy. But mostly she'd just stare.

It wasn't like that in the very beginning, the Angel said weakly and I knew he was ashamed.

It's okay, I told him. People can be nice at first, I know that. Then they find out about you.

The woman laughed. "You two are *so* sweet and pathetic. Like a couple of little children. I guess that's what you were looking for, wasn't it, darling? Except children can be cruel, too, can't they? So you got this—*creature* for yourself." She looked at me in the rear view mirror again as she slowed down a little, and for a moment I was afraid she'd seen what I was doing with the silvery stuff that was still pouring out of the Angel. It was starting to slow now. There wasn't much time left. I wanted to scream, but the Angel was calming me for what was coming next. "What happened to you, anyway?"

Tell her, said the Angel. To stall for time, I knew, keep her occupied.

I was born funny, I said. I had both sexes.

"A hermaphrodite!" she exclaimed with real delight.

She loves freaks, the Angel said, but she didn't pay any attention.

There was an operation, but things went wrong. They kept trying to

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fix it as I got older but my body didn't have the right kind of chemistry or something. My parents were ashamed. I left after awhile.

"You poor thing," she said, not meaning anything like that. "You were *just* what darling, here, needed, weren't you? Just a little nothing, no demands, no desires. For anything." Her voice got all hard. "They could probably fix you up now, you know."

I don't want it. I left all that behind a long time ago, I don't need it.

"*Just* the sort of little pet that would be perfect for you," she said to the Angel. "Sorry I have to tear you away. But I can't get along without you now. Life is so boring. And empty. And—" She sounded puzzled. "And like there's nothing more to live for since you left me."

That's not me, said the Angel. That's you.

"No, it's a lot of you, too, and you know it. You know you're addictive to human beings, you knew that when you came here—when they *sent* you here. Hey, you, *pet*, do you know what his crime was, why they sent him to this little backwater penal colony of a planet?"

Yeah, I know, I said. I really didn't, but I wasn't going to tell her that.

"What do you think about *that*, little pet neuter?" she said gleefully, hitting the accelerator pedal and speeding up. "What do you think of the crime of refusing to mate?"

The Angel made a sort of an out-loud groan and lunged at the steering wheel. The car swerved wildly and I fell backwards, the silvery stuff from the Angel going all over me. I tried to keep scooping it into my mouth the way I'd been doing, but it was flying all over the place now. I heard the crunch as the tires left the road and went onto the shoulder. Something struck the side of the car, probably the guard rail, and made it fishtail, throwing me down on the floor. Up front the woman was screaming and cursing and the Angel wasn't making a sound, but, in my head, I could hear him sort of keening. Whatever happened, this would be it. The Angel had told me all that time ago, after I'd taken him home, that they didn't last long after they got here, the exiles from his world and other worlds. Things tended to *happen* to them, even if they latched on to someone like me or the woman. They'd be in accidents or the people here would kill them. Like antibodies in a human body rejecting something or fighting a disease. At least I belonged here, but it looked like I was going to die in a car accident with the Angel and the woman both. I didn't care.

The car swerved back onto the highway for a few seconds and then pitched to the right again. Suddenly there was nothing under us and then we thumped down on something, not road but dirt or grass or something, bombing madly up and down. I pulled myself up on the back of the seat just in time to see the sign coming at us at an angle. The corner of it started to go through the windshield on the woman's side

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and then all I saw for a long time was the biggest display of silver fireworks ever.

It was hard to be gentle with him. Every move hurt but I didn't want to leave him sitting in the car next to her, even if she was dead. Being in the back seat had kept most of the glass from flying into me but I was still shaking some out of my hair and the impact hadn't done much for my back.

I laid the Angel out on the lumpy grass a little ways from the car and looked around. We were maybe a hundred yards from the highway, near a road that ran parallel to it. It was dark but I could still read the sign that had come through the windshield and split the woman's head in half. It said, *Construction Ahead, Reduce Speed.* Far off on the other road, I could see a flashing yellow light and at first I was afraid it was the police or something but it stayed where it was and I realized that must be the construction.

"Friend," whispered the Angel, startling me. He'd never spoken aloud to me, not directly.

Don't talk, I said, bending over him, trying to figure out some way I could touch him, just for comfort. There wasn't anything else I could do now.

"I have to," he said, still whispering. "It's almost all gone. Did you get it?"

Mostly, I said. Not all.

"I meant for you to have it."

I know.

"I don't know that it will really do you any good." His breath kind of bubbled in his throat. I could see something wet and shiny on his mouth but it wasn't silver fireworks. "But it's yours. You can do as you like with it. Live on it the way I did. Get what you need when you need it. But you can live as a human, too. Eat. Work. However, whatever."

I'm not human, I said. I'm not any more human than you, even if I do belong here.

"Yes, you are, little friend. I haven't made you any less human," he said, and coughed some. "I'm not sorry I wouldn't mate. I couldn't mate with my own. It was too . . . I don't know, too little of me, too much of them, something. I couldn't bond, it would have been nothing but emptiness. The Great Sin, to be unable to give, because the universe knows only less or more and I insisted that it would be good or bad. So they sent me here. But in the end, you know, they got their way, little friend." I felt his hand on me for a moment before it fell away. "I did it after all. Even if it wasn't with my own."

The bubbling in his throat stopped. I sat next to him for awhile in the

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dark. Finally I felt it, the Angel stuff. It was kind of fluttery-churny, like too much coffee on an empty stomach. I closed my eyes and lay down on the grass, shivering. Maybe some of it was shock but I don't think so. The silver fireworks started, in my head this time, and with them came a lot of pictures I couldn't understand. Stuff about the Angel and where he'd come from and the way they mated. It was a lot like how we'd been together, the Angel and me. They looked a lot like us but there were a lot of differences, too, things I couldn't make out. I couldn't make out how they'd sent him here, either—by *light*, in, like, little bundles or something. It didn't make any sense to me, but I guessed an Angel could be light. Silver fireworks.

I must have passed out, because when I opened my eyes, it felt like I'd been laying there a long time. It was still dark, though. I sat up and reached for the Angel, thinking I ought to hide his body.

He was gone. There was just a sort of wet sandy stuff where he'd been.

I looked at the car and her. All that was still there. Somebody was going to see it soon. I didn't want to be around for that.

Everything still hurt but I managed to get to the other road and start walking back toward the city. It was like I could *feel* it now, the way the Angel must have, as though it were vibrating like a drum or ringing like a bell with all kinds of stuff, people laughing and crying and loving and hating and being afraid and everything else that happens to people. The stuff that the Angel took in, energy, that I could take in now if I wanted.

And I knew that taking it in that way, it would be bigger than anything all those people had, bigger than anything I could have had if things hadn't gone wrong with me all those years ago.

I wasn't so sure I wanted it. Like the Angel, refusing to mate back where he'd come from. He wouldn't, there, and I couldn't, here. Except now I could do something else.

I wasn't so sure I wanted it. But I didn't think I'd be able to stop it, either, any more than I could stop my heart from beating. Maybe it wasn't really such a good thing or a right thing. But it was like the Angel said: the universe doesn't know good or bad, only less or more.

Yeah. I heard *that*.

I thought about the waitress with no face. I could find them all now, all the ones from the other places, other worlds that sent them away for some kind of alien crimes nobody would have understood. I could find them all. They threw away their outcasts, I'd tell them, but here, we *kept* ours. And here's how. Here's how you live in a universe that only knows less or more.

I kept walking toward the city. ●

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ONE-TRICK DOG

by Bruce Boston

We've published a number of poems by Bruce Boston—among these, the 1985 Rhysling award-winning poem "For Spacers Snarled in the Hair of Comets" (*IAsfm*, April 1984). The author's latest collection of poetry, *Nuclear Futures*, has just been published by Velocities. "One-Trick Dog" is Mr. Boston's first short story to appear in *IAsfm*.

art: George Thompson

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Mr. Wayne was taking his daily exercise, walking Arthur around the lake in Nevley Park, when the sky darkened and a light snow began to fall. A few flakes fluttered against his cheeks. He could feel the cold through his heavy topcoat. He enjoyed the park when it was deserted, but at his age he couldn't afford a chill. He thumbed the control in his pocket. Arthur turned left onto a bridge which would cut their return journey by a good half mile. Mr. Wayne followed.

It was a low narrow structure, slightly arched, with concrete pilings and flanged metal guard rails which leaned over the water. Several lampposts stretched along its length remained unlit. As he approached the center of the bridge, Mr. Wayne noticed a man leaning on one railing. He too had a dog, which was on a leash. With a robodog there was no need for a leash, but Mr. Wayne knew that some people liked to pretend their pets were real.

The man stood at one side of the bridge, no more than ten feet wide, staring across the water. His dog stood at the other side. The leash, stretched tautly between them, blocked Mr. Wayne's passage.

As Arthur neared the pair, he gave a growl from low in his throat. A programmed reaction. Mr. Wayne flipped a control. Arthur stopped and sank back on his haunches.

The stranger looked up. He was a tall, large-boned man. A parka, its hood tightly cinched against the cold, made his face appear round and moon-like. Mr. Wayne nodded toward the dog, expecting the man to rein him in so he could pass.

"Ah, I see you've noticed Roscoe. Just got him this morning. Say hello, Roscoe." The dog turned toward Mr. Wayne. He raised one paw and gave a syrupy yelp. "He's GT's latest model, top of the line."

"Very nice," Mr. Wayne nodded.

The animal was also large, standing a good hand over Arthur. In terms of canine anatomy, Mr. Wayne observed, the design was unrealistic. It looked like a cross between a labrador and a lion. The coat was sleek black. The head was shaggy and hulking. There was something decidedly feline about the skull and the teeth seemed all wrong. "He's entirely nuclear-powered," the man went on, "a self-contained unit."

"Nice," Mr. Wayne repeated. The sky had grown darker. Snow sifted down more rapidly. Couldn't the man see that he wanted to pass?

He took a step forward.

The leash was still stretched across the bridge.

"What have you got there?" the stranger asked.

Mr. Wayne paused. "What?"

"Your dog. What model is it?"

"He's a Shepherd 7-B," Mr. Wayne answered. "Government issue," he added without apology.

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The man laughed. "I didn't even know the government made dogs."

"They don't any more," Mr. Wayne informed him. "Arthur is from the war. He'll be thirty-eight in April."

"Well, fancy that," the stranger said. "An army surplus dog." He approached more closely. The leash went slack, but he was still blocking the way. He squatted down in front of Arthur, who ignored him. "Well, can't say I'm crazy about the lines. And the coat's a little motley. But I guess they made them to last in those days."

"That's how shepherds are supposed to look," Mr. Wayne told him. "His coat was for camouflage, but it's well within the natural color range." He could have told the man that in his youth he had trained *real* dogs, that he had been there when the Arthur series was designed and they had even incorporated some of his ideas. He wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

The man stood up. "Does he do tricks?"

"Tricks?" Mr. Wayne said. Several snowflakes had just found their way past his collar and were melting on his neck. He could feel the dampness invading his bones and he repressed a shiver.

"Yeah, like Roscoe. Watch this." The man tuned back to his dog. He raised one hand and wiggled his fingers. "The controls are all in the glove, what do you think of that? But I like to talk to him, too. Makes it seem more realistic. Come on, Roscoe, roll over, boy."

Mr. Wayne watched as Roscoe rolled over, played dead, walked on his hind legs. The movements were jerky and mechanical. Nothing like a real dog. Few people were left who would notice the difference.

"He's an amazing animal," Mr. Wayne lied to cut the performance short. He was desperate to be rid of the man and on his way. A thin white coating now dusted the bridge. He'd have to hurry or he'd be trudging home in the snow. His feet would be soaked. Now if he just stepped a little to one side and signaled Arthur to follow . . .

"No, wait, wait!" The man once more stood in his path. "There's another trick you have to see. Come on, boy. Show the man your special trick."

Roscoe trotted over to Mr. Wayne and raised one leg. Mr. Wayne jumped back awkwardly, nearly losing his balance, as the yellow arc streamed into the fresh snow. He was sure some of it had splashed on his trousers. "Almost got you with that one!" The man was laughing so hard he was bent over. "But don't worry. It's only colored water."

Mr. Wayne was silent for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was very even. "Yes," he said.

"Yes?" the man asked, wiping his eyes with the back of his glove.

"Yes," Mr. Wayne repeated, "my dog knows a trick."

"Well, let's see it then," the man said.

Mr. Wayne released the safety. ●

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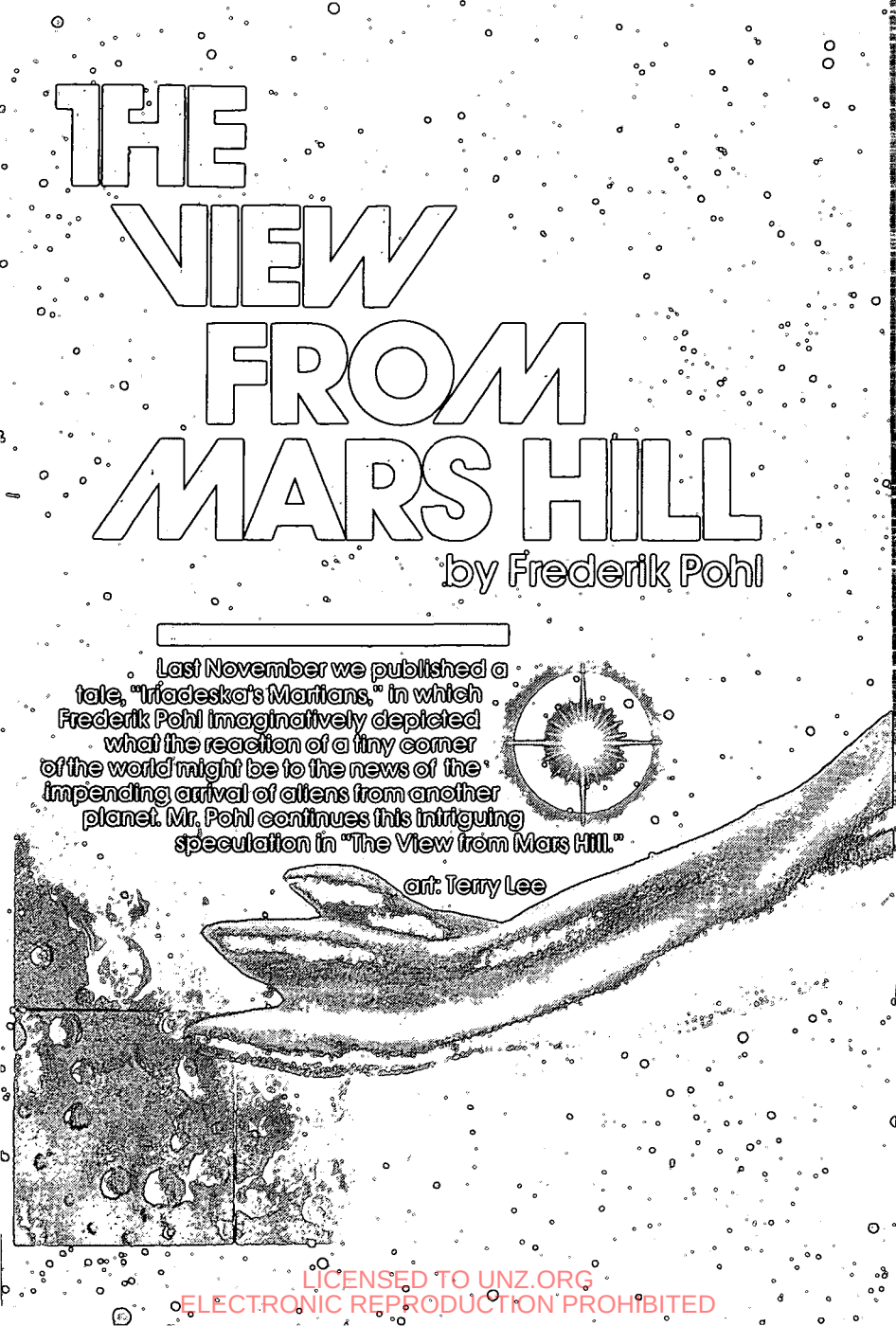
THE VIEW FROM MARS HILL

by Frederik Pohl

Last November we published a tale, "Iriadeska's Martians," in which Frederik Pohl imaginatively depicted what the reaction of a tiny corner of the world might be to the news of the impending arrival of aliens from another planet. Mr. Pohl continues this intriguing speculation in "The View from Mars Hill."

art: Terry Lee



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Because he had stayed late in his room, listening to the news on the American armed forces radio until the very last minute, Vladimir Malzhenitser hadn't had any breakfast. He didn't mind. He was buoyed up by excitement. There was more happiness and hope effervescing like bubbles of champagne in the arteries of his dumpy, soft body than he had felt in almost any of his sixty-odd years—many more than sixty, if one were to tell the truth, but he didn't have to tell the truth. When you were a refugee with no proper papers you could say what you liked about how old you were. How could anyone know if you lied?

Malzhenitser got off the bus at the tour headquarters, still buoyant. When the tour dispatcher, Stratos, told him that he was assigned to guide Germans that day even that did not dampen his mood, though it came close. It was not what he wanted. What he wanted was a busload of Americans. Rich Americans, probably. Certainly the kind of Americans who would share his excitement over the word from Mars with him. Especially Americans who were willing to accept praise for the wonderful American exploit of sending spaceships to Mars and bringing them back with live Martians incredibly aboard. On any other day, Germans might not be a bad second-best, he reflected as he peered over the tour-manager's shoulder to steal a glimpse at the day's assignment sheet. Germans too were interested in space. Unfortunately they seemed to be convinced that their Opel and their von Braun had invented it, with no assistance needed from expatriate Russian nationals.

Americans would be best.

He saw that his closest friend among the other guides, Theodora Senhilos—not really that close, and not always a friend, actually—had had the luck to draw that day's English-speaking group.

That could be corrected. Malzhenitser knew where Theodora would be at that moment. She too would have got up too late for breakfast. Undoubtedly she would now be swallowing a last cup of coffee in the little taverna around the corner. So Malzhenitser flipped a cheery wave to the tour manager and hurried there. He waved off the waiter who wanted to sell him the genuine American French toast breakfast and sank down next to the old woman. "Will you trade with me today, please?" he coaxed. "Remember, three weeks ago when your grandson became ill in school I took your people back to their hotels for you."

"And three times since three weeks ago I have done the same for you," the woman returned. Her tone was waspish, but then it always was. "How many favors must repay one favor? In any case, my English is better than yours."

"Your German is also better than mine," Malzhenitser wheedled. That was pure flattery, and quite untruthful. He had learned German very

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well, in a place where to learn German quickly and completely meant very much increasing one's chances of remaining alive.

Theodora recognized the flattery. She also enjoyed it; she only snorted, but didn't deny what he said. "For that reason," he went on, "I need the practice in English so that when my visa is approved I will be ready."

"In that case, you have plenty of time," she said. She wasn't being unusually disagreeable. She was only stating what she believed to be a fact. Malzhenitser, unfortunately, often believed the same thing; but not today. Today the news from the Martian expedition was too exciting for such doubts.

"It will come! Have you heard the news broadcasts? They are already making plans to send another expedition to Mars once this one is safely back—it is all because of the fact that they discovered living Martians, which upsets everyone and makes them hungry to learn more. The American president this morning has announced that this will happen! So they will need me, Theodora. Where else will they find people with expert knowledge of the Soviet space program?"

"In Moscow, of course! Not here in Athens."

"But in Moscow the people they would like cannot leave," Malzhenitser pointed out.

"And without a visa neither can you," she said, but she was softening. She shook her head. "Always these dreams, Volya. If the Americans wanted you you would have been there ten years ago when you first defected. You would not now be a starving tour guide in Greece, especially in Athens, about which you know so little." But then she relented; Americans or Germans, what did it signify? It was, after all, a matter of indifference to a woman who spoke six languages colloquially. She said grudgingly, "Very well, we will exchange. I will notify Stratos. But in return you may pay for my coffee."

Stratos was annoyed about the switch of assignments: "It is I who prepares the assignments!" he shouted, as he always did. But, as always, he let it stand. Stratos didn't much like Malzhenitser anyway—probably, Malzhenitser believed, because of Stratos's lifelong membership in the Greek Communist Party, which caused him not to care for Russians who had fled their country for the decadent west. However, for that same reason Stratos was determined to have at least one Russian-speaking guide on the roster. That was politics, not business. It would have harmed the tourist agency's finances very little to pretend that Russians didn't even exist, since not enough of them came as tourists to Athens to fill a bus even once a month. But the tour director had concerns beyond mere money. So Stratos put up with Malzhenitser's accented German and English, and even with the fact that Malzhenitser wasn't Greek, just so

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that when a trade mission from Kiev or Leningrad allowed its members a few hours off to study the cultural history of the ancient Greeks they would have faultless (and, above all, politics-free) Russian spoken to them on the tour.

In those respects, Malzhenitser was perfect. When he guided Russians the rage and resentment that his heart held against the Soviets never got past the smile on his lips. He knew that if he displeased Stratos his job was lost. Then worse would almost certainly follow, because then it was very likely that the Greek government might stop turning a blind eye to his irregular status.

In matters like the concealment of feelings Malzhenitser was quite skilled, because those skills, too, had contributed to the survival of a young man who had been so unfortunate as to be captured by the Germans in their 1942 offensive . . . and so foolish as to take what had seemed the best way out of the Nazi wartime extermination camps.

Malzhenitser had never had good luck with governments. The Russians had sent him off to get captured. The Germans had done their best to kill him. The Greeks tolerated him only because he meticulously kept a low profile. He didn't like any of them. That made him, Malzhenitser believed, a perfect candidate for American citizenship, because he had observed that Americans never got along with their government, either, but managed to remain free and rich anyhow.

He would, Malzhenitser was confident, fit right in in the U. S. of A.—if he could ever get that fool in the consulate to give him his visa.

So while the tour bus was ponderously squeezing through Athens's choked streets, Malzhenitser was studying his clients of the day.

He did his job while he was assessing them. He did not fail to point out Hadrian's Arch and the Temple of Olympian Zeus—or what was left of them after a couple millennia of neglect and a couple decades of acid air. He indicated the best restaurants and pastry shops, and the most fashionable shopping streets. He showed the passengers where Evzones were changing the guard, and the Parliament building and all the other buildings of state. But all the while he was canvassing the occupants of every seat, trying to locate his quarry.

There were no suitable people in the first three rows; those were filled by a party of Australians on a package tour. There was nothing to be gained from those at the back of the bus, either. They were all Americans, all right. But none of them seemed to be over the age of twenty-five, and certainly none of them looked like the sort of person who might have any influence with the American state department.

The only other Americans were, surprisingly, three black couples.

Malzhenitser studied them as he moved along the aisle, handhold by handhold. The blacks seemed to be traveling together; well, one would

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expect that. Perhaps. Malzhenitser was not very sure of what one might expect, since he had never had much experience with blacks. At least these particular specimens did not seem to be the kind one saw at the cinema, which was to say the kind who carried portable tape-players on their shoulders and jived as they walked. Nor did they look likely to mug anyone. He observed that they were fashionably dressed, in the style of American tourists in a hot climate—all three of the women, and one of the men, were wearing shorts, and all had sunglasses. Still, he was far less hopeful than he might have been. Out of his limited knowledge he conjectured they would not be likely to be very useful to him. They would probably be either dentists or clergymen of some kind, since no other American blacks seemed wealthy enough to travel as far as Greece. In either case, they were not likely to be influential where it mattered.

The situation did not look promising. Malzhenitser's mood began to sink slowly from the morning high.

Still, one must not give up. So, while the bus was groaning up the hill toward the steps that led to the Parthenon, Malzhenitser cruised the aisle. He should have been staying up front with the microphone, and the driver was staring curiously at his back. But Malzhenitser chose to do now what he would normally have left till almost the end. He made his way along the bus from seat to seat, asking which hotel each couple wanted to be returned to, listening carefully to accents in case he had overlooked a chance. He hadn't; but God was good to him that morning.

One of the black men was scowling over a Paris *Herald-Tribune*, open to a headline that read:

PRESIDENT ENDORSES SECOND MARS MISSION PLAN

while his wife, twisted around over the back of the seat to talk to one of the other wives, was complaining, "I don't expect *favors* just because Jeffrey's brother is in Congress, but I do think the embassy here could give us at least *consideration* like any other American citizen in a strange country when the airlines have smashed a suitcase."

A Congressman's brother!

It was the closest Malzhenitser had ever come to anyone with real power in America—and on the very day the American president had announced a new Mars program. Just the day when it could be most useful!

Vladimir Malzhenitser had not started out to be a traitor to his country.

For that matter, he didn't even think he was now. In Malzhenitser's view it was his country which had been traitor to him. First it had drafted him into the Red Army, a child of sixteen, to fight in the Great Patriotic War against Adolf Hitler. Well, you could understand that, he acknowledged fairly. Hitler had certainly invaded the U.S.S.R. with tanks and

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planes and armies of very efficient slaughterers, and the need was great. Young Volodya Malzhenitser had been glad enough to fight. If being a Russian had not been reason enough, then being a Russian Jew—even a non-practicing, non-believing, even non-circumcized one—certainly was.

But then the high command of the Red Army, following whatever strategic devices no one could imagine, had thrown Malzhenitser's single division against a German armored thrust of two entire assault armies. The orders were to hold fast at any cost, and a bullet in the head for the first Soviet soldier who took a step in retreat. They could not retreat. They also could not contain the crushing power of the German Juggernaut; so there were only two possibilities for any soldier in Malzhenitser's division. He could surrender. Or he could die.

Malzhenitser chose not to die.

A little later, when he found that the German prisoner-of-war camp for Red Army soldiers was no more merciful than Auschwitz if a little slower, he was far from sure he had made the right choice.

But then, one winter day when the future looked painfully terminal, a delegation came to the POW camp. They were uniformed, well fed, strutting about with officers' insignia on their well tailored uniforms—and they spoke in Russian! They *were* Russian. They came from the headquarters of General Vlasov, and they had a thrilling message to deliver.

"Brave Russian soldiers!" went their call to arms. "Join with us! We will form a Free Russian Army! We will fight against the Bolsheviks who had betrayed us until we overthrow their evil regime. Then we will liberate our homes and make our beloved Russia free!"

It had sounded very plausible, not to say glorious.

This General Vlasov, as every Red Army soldier knew, was neither hooligan nor Trotskyist. Vlasov had been decorated with Stalin's own medal, earned by courage and skill. If in his last campaign he had been captured by the Germans, well, so had Malzhenitser and every other prisoner of war in the camp.

So young Malzhenitser, by then all of nineteen years old, almost, had joined Vlasov's armies of Russian prisoners signed up to fight on the German side against their brothers.

At least there he was fed. At least there he got a uniform to replace the rags he had surrendered in, even if it was a German uniform. At least when the war ended Vladimir Malzhenitser was still alive, and in that way far luckier than twenty million of his countrymen.

Then the luck ran out.

When the Germans surrendered, the Vlasovites had to surrender too. That time the luck went all to the Germans. They were rounded up to be put in prisoner-of-war camps, and then, after actually a quite short

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time, they were allowed to return to their homes. When Vlasov's Russians were rounded up the place they went to was the Gulag.

So nineteen-year-old Malzhenitser became thirty-year-old Malzhenitser before Khrushchev's amnesty emptied some of the camps and, all unready, he found himself a free man again—or as free as any Soviet citizen with a blemished record was likely to be.

The years in the Gulag camps had not been a total loss for Malzhenitser. Early on he had found a valuable friend in the person of an old man named Kostya Gershuni.

Kostya was ancient but strong; moreover, he had once been a rocket scientist. He had actually known Tsiolkovsky. He had been allowed to travel outside the Soviet Union! Kostya, in the long nights in the camps, boasted to wistful, yearning young Malzhenitser of those wonderful days. He had been allowed to visit Berlin's fledgling German Rocket Society. He had even crossed the Atlantic Ocean—once—to interview the American, Goddard, at his tinker-toy rocket proving ground in Worcester, Massachusetts, U.S.A. The travels had been *wonderful*, the old man told Malzhenitser with a smile and a tear. They had turned out expensive. Those Western contacts had been what had put him in the camps in the first place, in the paranoid Stalin purge days of the 1930s.

Then that same record made the camps bearable for the old man. When in 1947 the Great Patriotic War was over, and the Leader decided that to keep the Soviet Union's wonderful new status as a superpower it must ready itself for missiles and space travel, it was his background in rocketry and allied sciences that had got Kostya Gershuni out of the soul-destroying physical labor of the tundra camps to a new assignment, to help build from scratch the new Space City at Baikanur.

And because Malzhenitser had excelled at mathematics in school, the old man was able to take the young one with him.

So for a couple of decades after he got his freedom, Malzhenitser slowly worked his way back to a position almost of respect. He was never a big figure in the Soviet space program. But he was on the scene from its beginnings. Since he had helped build Baikanur he was kept on to work there. He once did some computations for Shklovsky. He helped prepare orbits for a dozen cosmonauts. He was entrusted with checking the programs that sent the first Venera probe to Venus—he and many others, because there was invariably someone to check the checkers. Finally he was even allowed to attend a meeting of the International Astronautical Federation in Vienna, and that was the chance he had been waiting for. He slipped out of his pension and made his way to the American embassy to defect.

The Americans wouldn't have him.

It was a matter of regulations, they told him; their hands were tied.

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He admitted being a member of Vlasov's army, didn't he? And the Vlasov armies were actually Nazi S.S. units, were they not? Well, then. The immigration laws were very strict. No ex-Nazi, or a person who had served in a Nazi *party* fighting force, could be accepted into the puritanically clean United States . . . unless, of course, some person with good political connections really wanted him there, in which case the hell with the immigration laws. But no one wanted so small a fish as Malzhenitser that much. Go away, they told him. Aren't you Jewish? Then try Israel; they have to take you.

And so Israel did; but after Malzhenitser had found out that former S.S. troops were not beloved in Israel, even if they happened to have had Jewish parents, he was happy to be allowed to slip into Greece on a tourist visa.

He had been there ever since.

There weren't any jobs for space scientists in Greece. They did have jobs, though not the kind of jobs that paid very well, for multilingual persons capable of memorizing the history of the Golden Age of Pericles.

So Malzhenitser became a guide. And thought he would die a guide. Until the Martians showed up.

Abominable little ugly creatures they were, Malzhenitser thought affectionately; hardly intelligent; homely organisms the size of terriers, with bodies like seals and legs like spiders—but what did that matter?

They were Martians!

They had revived the flagging American interest in space exploration as nothing else had done since that first walk on the surface of the Moon. Now the President of the United States had definitely stated, it was right there in the newspapers, that another Martian expedition would be launched! Within a year, two or three at the most, another fleet of ships would lift themselves off the scorched pads of Cape Canaveral into orbit—

And they would—*perhaps* they would—lift Vladimir Malzhenitser out of Athens.

On the venerable but uneven pavement at the summit of the Acropolis Malzhenitser gathered his flock together, just as the apostle Paul had done on the Areopagus just across the way. "This temple, the Parthenon," he droned, "which was designed by the great artist Phidias two thousand five hundred years ago, was severely damaged in the war of liberation against the Turks. Then it was loot— then further damaged," he corrected himself swiftly; these were not Germans or Russians he was speaking to and some of them might not be pleased to hear Lord Elgin referred to as a looter—"when many of its most valuable pieces of sculpture were taken to museums all over the world. All of this marble was quarried from the mountains you see behind me and then brought here to be fitted

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together, without mortar, in a way that has lasted all these centuries. Why is this temple called the Parthenon? Because it was dedicated to the goddess Athena Parthenos, which means 'virgin.' And why is the hill we are standing on called the Acropolis? Because those are the Greek words for 'high place'; this was the highest point in ancient Athens. Now," he finished, "you have forty-five minutes to walk by yourselves, take photographs, perhaps have a cooling drink at the cantina at the bottom of the steps. We will meet again at the bus. . . . " The programmed lecture wasn't finished; he went on with the standard pleas to be in time and threats that the bus would leave without anyone who wasn't; but these were experienced tourists who knew that page of the script as well as he did, and the group had already begun to dissolve.

That was fine with Malzhenitser. He had his eye on the three black couples. As he turned and strolled away he neatly intersected their path, smiled and said to the black Congressman's brother, "If you would care to walk with me? Just over there are some particularly good points to take pictures from—perhaps you would like me to snap all six of you, with the temple just behind?"

And, of course, they would.

Among the things Malzhenitser knew best was how to charm tourists—that was what brought the tips in. He gave them one of the finest private lectures of his career: about Phidias and the great statue that had disappeared; about the ruined structure that had been the gate one approached the Parthenon by—about the Areopagus. That was the make-or-break point. He performed with exquisite skill. "It was on that rock," he said, pointing, "that St. Paul preached to the Athenians, and on that same rock where Orestes was condemned for his crime. Do you know what Areopagus is named for? It might be called 'Mars Hill'—perhaps," he said, twinkling, "some rich American might buy it and move it to the States, because certainly the Americans have a right to anything concerning Mars now! Oh, I do admire the skill of your scientists. I myself spent many years in the Soviet space program before I was able to escape—participated in many Soyuz launches, in the planning for the Mars orbiter—I suppose you could say," he added deprecatingly, "that I was perhaps their principal expert on Mars studies for a time. But now—"

He smiled and shrugged and went on to the other glories of Greece.

But he had them.

By the time the bus was ready he had exchanged commiserations on the failings of the slovenly, time-serving diplomats at the American embassy; he had dazzled them with a history of the Soviet, German, and American space efforts; he had ascertained that the tall, forbidding one, Bayard, was a lawyer, the plump one with the silly little beard and the wife who looked almost white a real-estate operator, and the one named

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Thatcher, praise God!, indeed a brother of a real American congressman; and he had received an only slightly grudging invitation to join them at their hotel for a drink that evening.

When the tour was finished Malzhenitser's heart sang. America was possible at last. Ugly and wretched as those Martians were, they had served his purpose: the Americans would launch their next Martian expedition, and now that he had a possible ally to help him he might yet become part of it!

In the hotel Georgette Thatcher declared, "I don't like getting involved with this man, Jeffrey. He could be a spy or something."

"Honey," her husband said reasonably, "what do we know to spy on?"

"I don't mean Russian. CIA, maybe. Or IRS."

She caught her husband taking a sip of his drink, and the involuntary twitch of the American businessman who hears the initials "IRS" made it look as though the Scotch had spoiled. It was only momentary. "There is nothing to worry about," he declared.

"Yeah," said Georgette Thatcher; and then, executing a swift reversal, "Well, anyway, it could be really interesting to find out more about this man. Maybe I could even give a talk at the church about him."

"You certainly could," Thatcher agreed. He was used to his wife's way of stating diametrically opposed arguments for and against anything new—but then almost always opting for the novelty. Georgette might confuse her husband, but she seldom bored him.

Jeff Thatcher was neither a dentist nor a minister, but his father had been the one, and Georgette's father had been the other. The Thatchers had married and started their adult lives just in time for the benefits of the civil rights revolution. The dentist's savings, and the minister's skills at wangling scholarships, had got the two of them into Northwestern University, where they met and after which they married. Neither Thatcher nor his brother had chosen to follow their father into tooth repair. The older brother, Walter, had opted for law, and then politics. He was in his second term in the House of Representatives, and his name was sometimes talked about for U.S. Senator from Illinois. Financially, Jeffrey had done even better than his brother. He had majored in business administration. Because they were born when they were born, to the people they were born to, both brothers had distanced their parents with ease. Jeffrey had signed with a head-hunter the day before his commencement and wound up with a first-rate job with a major corporation that wanted to improve its image, racial equality-wise.

That was the watershed event. In ways that neither Harriet Beecher Stowe nor John Brown could ever have imagined, everything else followed for the Thatchers. The FHA loaned them the eighty thousand

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dollars to buy a four bedroom house in the northwestern suburbs—now, with swimming pool, sun deck and inflation, probably worth more like a quarter of a million. When Jeffrey decided to strike out on his own, the Small Business Administration had advanced the capital; and now he was president of an insurance business that grossed six million dollars a year in premiums. Their suburban Methodist church, broadmindedly accepting into its congregation this first (but very respectable) black couple in the neighborhood, had quickly made Georgette their Social Action chairperson, and shortly after that a member of the local school board. They had no children. But they had prosperity—and two late-model BMWs in the garage, and an annual trip to Europe.

As they sat in the hotel bar, waiting for Malzhenitser to show up, they were a distinguished couple of middle years—too young for golf, too old to listen to funky music—and they were aware of it. Jeffrey was drinking Chivas on the rocks, Georgette was experimenting with ouzo. With her pale blue silk suit and his bleached-sand safari jacket, they were as tastefully dressed as any other couple in sight. "We're going to miss the floor show," Georgette said, pouring in a little water to watch the ouzo turn milky; she wasn't complaining, only setting out the possibilities again.

"But we'll be in time for the bouzouki dancing," her husband said peaceably. They were signed up, not with Malzhenitser's tour promoters, for an Athens at Night package, a Greek taverna dinner with music, to be followed by a son et lumiere at one of the old amphitheaters. It had seemed more interesting to Jeffrey than a drink with this ugly old foreigner, until he had got to talking with Bayard and Swanson.

"He's just coming in the door," said Georgette Thatcher, gazing into her milky drink.

"Let him come to us," said Jeff. He didn't look around. He wondered a little bit about this man, who had made it clear that he didn't expect to be paid for the evening, but would doubtless want a tip. Or something; in Jeffrey's experience everybody always wanted something.

But that was all right, because so did Jeff Thatcher.

At one time or another Vladimir Malzhenitser had been in every big hotel in Athens, not just fancy chain tourist-traps but the really elegant ones that tour brokers never booked. Generally speaking, he was bored with such decadent opulence. This time was different. He looked around the lobby with delight. He wasn't impressed by the mirrored walls or the great golden Foucault pendulum that swung from the six-story roof. What impressed Malzhenitser was money. He knew to the penny what the rooms, the meals, the drinks in these places cost. Americans! How

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wonderful, how *American*, to be able to be gouged so extortionately and even, almost, enjoy it!

He looked around, scowled at the bell captain who was about to greet him by name, and bustled over to the bar tables on the far side of the lobby. "Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Thatcher," he beamed, trying to smile without showing the gold teeth which, he knew, Americans considered vulgar. He produced the tiny box of chocolates with a flourish. "A small thing to add to your enjoyment of Athens," he said as he handed it over.

"How very thoughtful," said the black woman, sliding the coppery ribbon off the box without harming the little sprig of lilac under the bow. Malzhenitser approved. She was opening it with care; as he had paid eight hundred and fifty drachmae for the eight chocolates in the box, he appreciated the care. "Look, Jeff," she said. "It's candy."

"Real nice of you," said Thatcher. "Mind coming upstairs, Mr. Solzhenitsyn? Our friends wouldn't forgive us if we kept you to ourselves."

"Certainly!" cried Malzhenitser, delighted to be asked into a room of the hotel—it was almost like being invited into someone's home. "May I? It is 'Malzhenitser,' not 'Solzhenitsyn'—though, to be sure," he twinkled, "one must be flattered to be associated in any way with so great a Russian as the world's greatest author!"

"You bet," said Thatcher. He scribbled his name on the check and led the way to an elevator which moved so gently that Malzhenitser hardly knew they had left one floor before it arrived at another. "It's way at the end of the hall," he said, leading on.

"Yes, fine," said Malzhenitser, with pleasure. Better and better! The rooms at the ends of the halls were not rooms; they were suites. Oh, he had made no mistake in seeking out these black Americans, he assured himself, smiling and chattering as they strolled the hall.

A suite it was. Not one of the *big* suites that the really rich used, or the politically powerful, but still a living room and bedroom that cost more per night that Malzhenitser earned in a month. The other couples were there, rising gracefully as Malzhenitser and the Thatchers entered, the men shaking hands. "What you need," said the one called Bayard, "is a drink." He waved at a sideboard. Malzhenitser recognized Scotch, bourbon, a couple of kinds of liqueurs, half a dozen of those sweet American soda-pop drinks, and next to them platters of canapes, wafers of toast, even a pot of caviar. "Say what you'd like. Seven and seven be all right, Mr. Mal— Malzen—"

"Malzhenitser, please, sorry, it is such a difficult name," Malzhenitser apologized. "Could you possibly call me Volya? It is the intimate form of my given name, Vladimir."

"Sure," said Bayard cordially, but his wife said:

"But isn't that, well, like addressing you as a servant?" Gwen Bayard

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had taught French in the Chicago high-school system before her husband's real-estate business began to prosper, and she well understood the difference between tu and vous.

"But I am your servant, my dear lady," Malzhenitser said gallantly. "In any case, I am after all only a humble tour guide here in Greece, although in my own country's space program I was for many years something perhaps more distinguished."

"Yeah," said Thatcher. "I wanted to ask you about that. Sit down, why don't you? Ready for Ted to freshen your drink?"

Malzhenitser blinked. He hadn't tasted it yet. Was that offensive by the standard of American manners, to fail to drink what you were given at once? He took a swallow, almost gagged on the sticky-sweet soda and managed to say, "Yes? You wish to know about the Soviet space program. Well, I have been away from it for some time now, but my work in the calculation of ballistic orbits—oh, I assure you, only for non-military purposes—"

Bayard cut in, "You said Mars."

"Mars? Yes. Yes, I was deeply involved in the Mars orbiter—"

"Mars *Hill*, I mean."

"Mars Hill?" Malzhenitser had lost the thread of the conversation. He took another sip of the drink, frowning.

"You told us about it today. That little hill by the Acropolis. You called it by some other name—"

"Oh, of course," Malzhenitser cried, enlightened. "Mars Hill. Or, as it is called, the Areopagus. The hill where St. Paul preached. Of course," he added, trying to decipher what these black people were getting at, "in this case the word 'Mars' does not refer to the planet, but to the ancient god."

"But that's the right name for it? In English, I mean?" Bayard pressed. He seemed actually worried for a moment. When Malzhenitser reluctantly assented, Bayard relaxed and gazed around at his friends triumphantly. "Trouble with you, Mr.—Volya, is we're a couple of drinks ahead of you. Finish it up and let me make you another!"

"They have such pretty names, don't they?" said Mrs. Swanson, offering Malzhenitser the canape tray while Bayard was refilling the drinks.

"Of course," said Malzhenitser. He was not at all sure what she was talking about, but "of course" could have been taken to mean of course he would like one of the canapes. He acted it out by taking the nearest one. It turned out to be some sort of soft, sweet cheese with a slice of pale and nearly tasteless pepper of some kind on top. He would much have preferred the caviar, even though it was the big red kind, but wasn't sure how to ask. He took refuge in his refilled drink. It was sticky and

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sweet, like a child's drink, but it had an alcoholic bite, and Malzhenitser realized he was beginning to feel the effects.

"Let's talk business," said Jeff Thatcher affably.

Malzhenitser took refuge in another polite, "Of course." He managed to keep the question out of his voice, though he could not imagine what business they had in mind, unless— unless— He could not let himself believe that the "unless" could possibly be the thing he so desperately hoped it would be.

"I think you said you were a specialist on Mars for the Russian space program, right?" Thatcher inquired briskly, almost in the manner of a prosecuting attorney getting the basic facts on record before moving in for the kill.

"Oh, yes?" And then, collecting himself, "Yes, of course. In Baikanur. For many years. I was working on the Soviet space program in many matters, but in particular the Mars orbiter. You recall our orbiter project?" It was obvious they didn't. Malzhenitser sighed internally but kept the narrow smile on his lips and his tone light. "Our Martia spacecraft was required to enter a high-inclination orbit around the planet. It could not be truly polar—we did not have the maneuverability of your wonderful American spacecraft!—but it was so calculated that, over a period of seven weeks, the orbiter was able to map some ninety-three point eight per cent of the planet's surface. By 'mapping,' " he explained, "I do not just mean taking pictures with just an ordinary camera, of course. No, certainly not! In addition to the optical systems we had also infrared and ultraviolet frequencies, as well as contour-mapping radar, magnetometers, all those fine instruments. And," he added with a shrug of deprecation, "yes, it was I who calculated the orbit and the course corrections." *I and forty-five others, to be sure.* Yet it was not a lie. Malzhenitser was determined not to lie, at least not in any way that could possibly be discovered against him. Still, the risk was small. How could any American know exactly who had done what at Baikanur, when the Soviets would not even identify all of their crews by name? "—What?" he asked, surprised, as Mr. Swanson pulled something out of a dispatch case and handed it to him.

"If you know about Mars," Swanson said, "do you know what these places are?"

Malzhenitser peered at the paper. It was a map of Mars. It was not a very good map; it had been torn from an issue of the international edition of *Newsweek*, it appeared. But it did have the whole face of the planet—two faces, laid out in Mercator projection.

He glanced around at the intent faces watching him, then took his pince-nez out of his pocket. He wiped the lenses with the little cocktail

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napkin Mrs. Bayard had given him and studied the map. "Yes, I know this is Mars," he said uncertainly, wondering what was expected of him.

"But the particular *places*," Swanson said insistently. "Do you know what they are?"

"He means the ones with the pretty names, Volya," Swanson's wife said helpfully. "Like, here's one that says Lacus Solis, you see?"

Malzhenitser gazed at her, then bent to the map. "Yes, Lacus Solis," he said. "As you would say in English, Lake of the Sun. Of course, it is not truly a lake, you understand. All these major features were given names long ago by astronomers who did not possess very good telescopes. They thought, perhaps, that this was an actual lake, then, but we are now certain there is no free water of any kind, much less so large a lake!"

"Lake of the Sun," said Bayard thoughtfully. "Sun Lake. Sun Lake Drive?" He shrugged and pointed. "What about this here?"

Malzhenitser followed his finger, then said, "Yes, that is Olympus Mons. It is a mountain—a volcano, in fact; indeed, it is the most huge volcano ever discovered, anywhere in the solar system. Extinct now, of course—"

Mrs. Swanson was pursing her lips. "I don't know about that 'Mons.' It sounds, well, you know, sort of, uh, sexy."

Her husband said, "We could call it Olympus Mountain. Olympus Mountain Parkway? Mount Olympus Drive?"

"That's two drives already, honey," Mrs. Swanson pointed out.

"Write down the names and we'll figure that part out later," her husband commanded. "Okay, Volya. What're these other names?"

"Get the man another drink first," said Thatcher genially. "Can't you see you're working him too hard?"

Drink or no drink, Malzhenitser decided, they really were working him too hard, and the worrisome thing was that he didn't know what he was working at. Each new name he read from the map got a reaction. He did not comprehend what the reactions added up to. Valles Marineris bored them, though it immensely surpassed the Grand Canyon in size. Utopia Planita got a shake of the head—"Tried that in Schaumburg," said Bayard cryptically—and when he seized on Chryse Planita and told them about how the American Viking lander had set down there all Bayard said was, "Sounds kind of religious."

Then the men sat back, looking at each other. Bayard nodded to Swanson. Swanson nodded to Thatcher. Thatcher said:

"I think it's time for another drink." He sounded pleased, though Malzhenitser could not guess at the reason. So did Swanson, who chuckled as he got up to fix the new round of drinks; and so did Bayard as he rose to help him.

"I hope I have been of service," Malzhenitser said dismally.

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"Oh, you really have, Volya," beamed Bayard. "Here you are. Now let's talk business. I think you can help us with a little project we've got going near Chicago."

There had been moments of triumph in Malzhenitser's life before this—not many, true—certainly not *any* to compare with this! He felt himself glowing as he struggled forward from the deep armchair to accept his "freshener"—was it, he thought wonderingly, his fourth already? But what did that matter? Was there ever a better time than this to celebrate? *Chicago!* He rolled the word around the inside of his mouth as he took a deep swallow of the new drink. He no longer even tasted the sugary, lemony flavor of the drink. He only tasted the delicious word. Chicago was in *America.*

It was true, he told himself with puzzlement, that he had not heard of any space facilities in *Chicago.* No. Such things were in Houston, or Canaveral, or Vandenberg in California, or Huntsville in Alabama. Chicago, Malzhenitser was nearly sure, was perhaps farther north than any of these, so it could not be a launch site, at least; only Russians launched spacecraft where the weather was cold, and only because they had no choice.

Malzhenitser felt a slight touch of disappointment. He had seen so many pictures of the Cape, with its sands and crocodiles and palm trees and the blue Atlantic off to the east—fool, he told himself, amused at his reaction; there are palm trees here in Athens, America means *space*! America means *America.*

He became aware he was sweating with joy.

Malzhenitser furtively wiped his forehead with his cocktail napkin, wondering if anyone had noticed. He tried to sit up straight, paying attention to what was going on. The black man named Swanson was taking some typed pages out of a folder that bore the imprint of the hotel's public stenographer, speaking earnestly as he did. Malzhenitser thrilled as he caught the wonderful word "consultant."

"Yes, yes," he said, beaming, "a consultant, of course. Where my experience could be put to use. I would be honored to work on the American space program in any capacity. It has been my dream!"

He stopped. Swanson was shaking his head. "It isn't the space program, Mr.—Volya. We're talking about a private business venture. I thought I made that clear."

"Oh," said Malzhenitser. "Ah." He took another swallow of the drink. "Yes, I see. One has heard of these American private space ventures—marvelous that they should exist. Of course, since my background is in the Soviet Union I know little of such private projects. Still, if I can be part of a space program of any sort at all—"

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"Not space. Real estate."

Malzhenitser blinked at him.

"It's a real estate development," Swanson explained patiently. "Ted Bayard here is a developer."

"Ah," nodded Malzhenitser faintly. "A developer. Of real estate."

"The three of us have formed a sort of consultancy, you see. To help get it going."

Bayard put in, "It's a first-class tract, out near Barrington. Thirty-one acres of farmland, but it's got all city utilities, lake water, storm sewers. Everything. Mostly three-bedroom houses, you know, with nearly half an acre each. The model homes are almost ready and the streets are in. But, you see, I didn't know what to name them."

"Yes, of course," said Malzhenitser, who didn't really see at all. He took the papers Swanson was thrusting at him and glanced at the top. It was headed:

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

between Theodore Bayard, Victor S. Swanson, and Jeffrey Thatcher, d/b/a Mars Hill Associates, an unincorporated limited partnership, and (BLANK) Solzhenitser, a Russian national currently residing in Athens, Greece.

"You'll have to change where your name is on the contract," Swanson apologized. "I wasn't sure of the spelling when I dictated it."

"To be sure," Malzhenitser nodded, trying to make sense of the document.

"But this is perfect," Bayard went on. "We'll call the whole development Mars Hill! We'll name the streets after Martian geography—I don't think anybody's thought of that before!"

"And it's so timely," his wife added. "And anyway, you can't keep on with like Harvard, Princeton, Yale, or the names of the presidents, or birds, or trees. We wanted something really different."

"And because we never would have thought of this without you," Thatcher finished virtuously, "we decided it was only fair to make you a consultant. With a royalty on every house sold. And an advance against royalties."

"So," said Swanson, "if you'd just care to sign the agreement—"

"And I'll give you your advance in cash right now," smiled Bayard, opening his wallet. "Two hundred dollars American. Let's see, the rate they gave us this morning was about a hundred and thirty pesetas to the dollar—"

"Drachmae, dear," chided his wife.

"I mean drachmae." Bayard counted out twenty-six thousand-drachmae notes. "And we're very grateful to you, Mr.—Volya. Be sure to put

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your address on the contract, so we'll know where to send your royalties. And, gee, I wish we could ask you to stay with us for dinner, but we've made these other plans—"

"But first," beamed Thatcher, "one final drink. To Mars Hill! To the finest new development in northwest Cook County!"

As he stepped unsteadily off the dizzyingly gentle elevator Malzhenitser realized he had an urgent need to urinate. He walked with unsteady dignity across the lobby, nodding frostily to the night bell captain, and entered the men's room.

He did have 26,000 drachmae, that was sure. It was nearly a month's pay. It was worth having.

But he did not have the visa.

On the other hand, he thought, leaning one hand against the cold, hard enamel top of the urinal to steady himself, he had certainly done a favor, some sort of favor, for the actual brother of an actual U.S. congressman. It was not at all unreasonable to think that he could, perhaps, use the congressman as a reference when next he visited the American consulate. It was even possible that that stony-hearted woman, the vice-consul, might even listen.

As he hurried out of the hotel toward the place where he could catch his bus home he thought, *First a new suit. The money will be useful for that! Then a letter to the congressman. Then when I get an answer, for certainly he will be polite enough to send me an answer, I go to the consulate once more. And then—*

He could not see beyond that final "and then," but as he walked rapidly through the hot, soggy streets of Athens toward the bus stop, he decided that perhaps, after all, his luck might yet be turning.

When the three black couples got down to the lobby ten minutes later they were very pleased with themselves. There wasn't room for all six of them in one of the tiny Greek taxis, so they split up. The wives went first. The men, grinning, jostled around the doorman as he whistled frantically for another cab. They had not matched Malzhenitser drink for drink, but they had each had a few, and they were very cheerful.

"I think it's going to rain," observed Swanson.

"Doesn't matter," said Thatcher, "because tomorrow we'll be in Cairo. Anyway, what's a little rain when we've just beat the Feds out of a lot of money?"

They all laughed good-naturedly, and Bayard said in admiration, "And all it cost us was two hundred bucks. Don't forget to kick in your share, you two."

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"Any time," said Thatcher, "but don't forget we have to pay old Volya his royalty yet—what was it, five dollars a house?"

"I only said three," argued Bayard, turning to the lawyer.

"Don't be greedy," Swanson reproved. "I made it five when I dictated the contract. Otherwise he wouldn't get any royalties at all, and it wouldn't look legitimate."

"Well—" the builder said doubtfully. Then he grinned. "What the heck! Sixty-six houses. So we're talking about a little over a hundred each. You're sure this is okay, Bill?"

"Positively," said the lawyer. "Look at the facts. The development is real. You're really going to follow the advice of us consultants. We've made this trip to Athens to engage this other consultant. We devoted an entire day to him, all of us, wives and all. We even signed the contract—no, it's iron-clad; I'll handle the audit for you guys personally, if they argue it."

"A hundred and change each, and we get to write off the whole trip," said Bayard admiringly. "Jeff, that was a brainstorm!"

"Damn brilliant," Swanson agreed. And Thatcher, basking in their respect, shrugged deprecatingly.

"Every little tax deduction helps," he said. "Especially when it's like a couple thousand dollars each!" And then, as the cab finally showed up and the perspiring doorman opened the door for them, "Hey!"

The others paused, looking at him. "Forget your wallet?" Bayard asked.

"No! Remembered something! Cairo!"

"Yes, sure, we're going there tomorrow. What about it?"

Thatcher's grin was heavenly. "The Pyramids! The Sphinx! All that Egyptian stuff, you know? Don't you have a different development going in after Mars Hill? Maybe we can find a camel driver or somebody—"

"And set up another consultancy? Oh, Ted," Bayard cried, "*listen*. Do you know what you've got here? Every year! China! India! *Rio de Janeiro*, for God's sake—fellows, if we work it right, we've got the next ten years' vacations taken care of!"

"And," said Swanson virtuously, "every dollar of it perfectly legal!" ●

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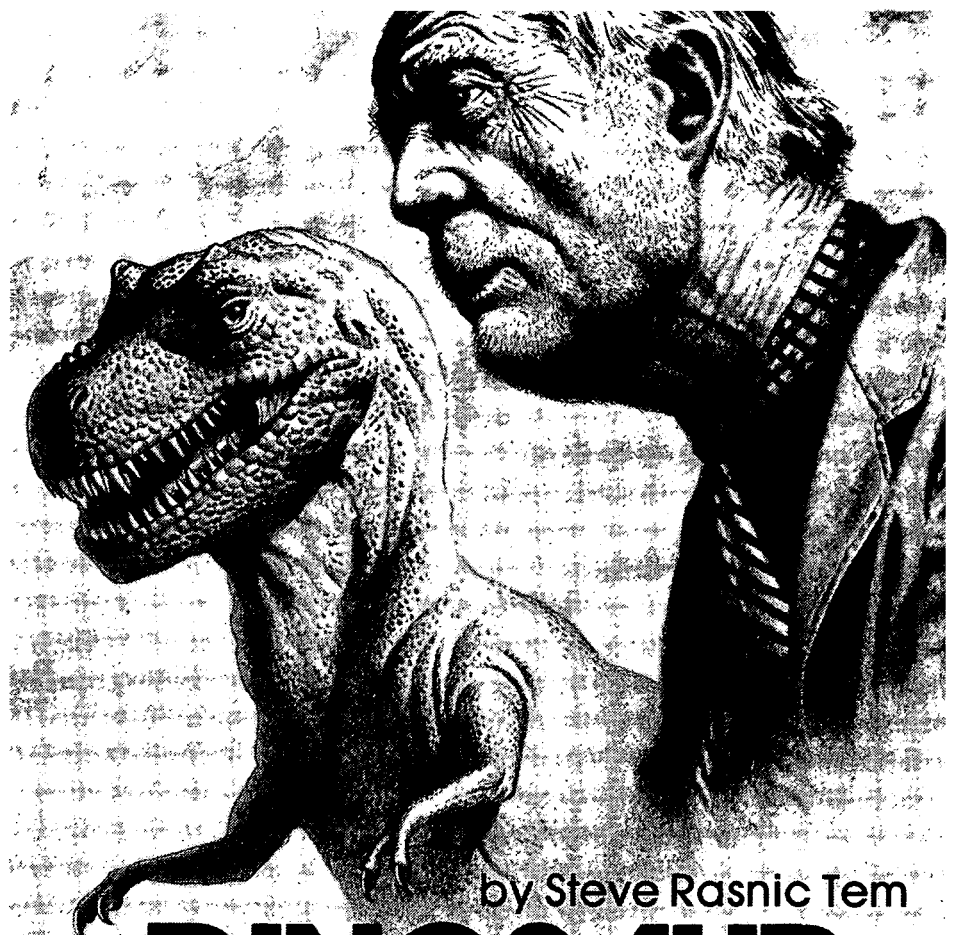

by Steve Rasnic Tem

DINOSAUR

Steve Rasnic Tem tells us that he recently sold his hundredth short story, and that his novel, *Excavations*, will soon be published by Avon books. He is currently at work on three horror novels, but we hope he'll be able to set aside some time to write more of his interesting short stories.

art: Bob Walters

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Where did the dinosaurs go? The children looked down at their desks. A change of climate, ice age, caterpillars eating their food, disease, mammals eating their eggs. Freddy Barnhill was thinking these answers but was too self-conscious to raise his hand. The teacher waited. But nobody's really sure, Freddy thought. Nobody knows.

Sometimes he thought they might be lost somewhere. They couldn't find their way. They couldn't keep up with the others, the way the world was changing so. So they got left behind. They got abandoned.

Twenty years later, Freddy drove the fifty-nine miles between Meeker and Rangely twice each day thinking about his father and thinking about dinosaurs. Only occasionally were there changes in subject matter, although he would have expected both topics to be exhausted by now. People might call him obsessed; hell, people would call him crazy.

Along Colorado Highway 64, endless streams of yellow-blooming rabbit grass whipped by, each scrub-dotted washout and arroyo threatening to draw his eye up its channel and send him into the ditch. Almost as soon as he turned the pickup onto the road, he would start to see his father's enormous hands pressing down at him from above the bar. He'd feel himself suddenly afraid of his father's instability and scurry under the table to hide. Then he'd hear the sudden crash of his father's huge head on the table as he passed out. An endless crash; his father's head slammed the hard wood again and again the fifty-nine miles between Meeker and Rangely.

There seemed to be little life in the gulleys and low hills. Harsh land which had to be struggled with, which swallowed any failed attempts. Early settlers had named this land with their complaints: Devil's Grave, Bitter Creek, Camp Misery, Bugtown, Poverty Gulch. Rotted houses around clumps of tumbleweed leaned from the hillsides like aged throats, their swollen walls collapsing. The broken fingers of ancient windmills reached toward an empty sky.

Once he reached Rangely, the sense of lifelessness was even more pronounced—gray, lunar sandstone in ridges and flatlands as far as the eye could see. A wind-blasted landscape alive with sagebrush, little else. The oil companies' reservation: new and old riggings, abandoned shacks. His father had spent most of his adult life here, working for one outfit or another.

Mel Barnhill had originally been a cowboy. A drifter. Then when things had begun to change with the oil wells coming in, he'd changed, too. He'd been a mechanic, construction worker, jack-of-all-trades. Freddy remembered seeing him work on some of the early crude equipment, even some of the steam-operated earthmovers. Enormous brown hands working with rough-made wrenches. Smiling, singing—he always had been happy working with machinery. Freddy had helped him, sort of, as much as any

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very small boy might help his father in his work. But that time had passed. As had the life of the cowboy.

His father had liked to think of himself as an outlaw. "Don't need no laws, no woman to tie me down. Like to do as I please."

Freddy remembered following his father up the street after one of the man's long drinking bouts. The swagger in the walk, he thought now, had been reminiscent of Butch Cassidy or professional killer Tom Horn, who used to hide out not far from there. Cattle were still being rustled at the time, and Freddy could recall more than once his father hinting that he had had a part in some of it. He'd wink at Freddy sometimes when he said this, but Freddy never could tell if that meant he was just joking, or that he really had done those things, and Freddy was supposed to be extra proud. The first time Freddy'd seen a John Wayne movie, he'd thought that was his father up on the screen. The walk was the same. After a time he began to wonder if his father practiced it.

Dramatic gestures seemed to be a lot of what the oldtimers in the area were about. Gestures for a fading way of life.

When he thought about it now, Freddy believed his father had known the life was rapidly becoming obsolete, the cowboy and rancher becoming extinct. It was the end of an era. Not long after his father's time, they built that new power plant at Craig, and the old timers suddenly didn't know every face when they came into town. People had to lock their doors.

"Dumb cowboys! Stupid sodbusters!" Freddy's father had been drunk, screaming hoarsely in a corral outside a Rangely bar. Freddy remembered the incident vaguely; he'd seen only part of it through the bar window. But every time he ran into one of his father's old friends, it was recalled.

His father had been drinking with some of his cowboy friends; there'd been an argument. They'd accused Mel of turning his back on them, becoming a city boy, because he worked for the oil companies.

Little Freddy had shuddered behind the window. His father was dragging a cow out of the barn. Before anyone could do anything, he shot it. The big brown animal collapsed as if in slow motion, its head making a sick thud on the hard ground. One of the waitresses had held Freddy so tightly it scared him, but it had calmed him down.

This was the landscape Mel Barnhill had willed to his son. It provided the backdrop for most of Freddy's dreams. And yet it was at the *outskirts* of Rangely that, every day, Freddy started thinking about dinosaurs.

Fourteen miles north of Rangely was the little town of Dinosaur. And twenty-seven miles west of there, just across the Utah border and above Jensen, was the big Dinosaur Quarry of the Dinosaur National Monument. One of the largest sources of dinosaur fossils in the world. Primitive

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land, or the way the earth might look after some catastrophe. Freddy didn't go any more. Standing up there looking out over the canyons, where the Colorado Plateau had crashed up against the Uinta range, it was as if his whole life might disappear out there someday, pulled into the emptiness.

Over each street sign in the town of Dinosaur was a little red cutout of a Stegosaurus. The streets had names like Brontosaurus, Pterodactyl, Tyrannosaurus Rex. The town looked old, almost as old as the surrounding land, with tar-paper shacks here and there and rough board houses. It used to be called Artesia before the Interior Department set up the park.

But most of the tourists went over to Utah, to Jensen and Vernal. Dinosaur was just a place people passed through on their way to somewhere else; there was no restaurant, not even a half-decent service station. Only a few hundred in population—there hadn't been many people in the first place, and most of them had gone a long time ago. The red on the dinosaur cutouts looked a lot like rust.

Freddy worked in Rangely, just as his dad had, but he lived in Meeker. He liked Meeker, although most of the other men his age complained that there was nothing to do. It was a quiet town; there weren't too many cowboys, and it lacked Rangely's construction and oil workers. Freddy was relieved.

The pickup slid in gravel, and Freddy fought to right it. You had to be careful driving the roads out here; they lulled you, made you careless. The truck seemed so easy to drive, it had so much power, that you sometimes forgot how dangerous one slip might be. One of the drawbacks to advanced technology, and to evolution. It made you reckless; it became too easy to lose control over the power. And that power could leave you upside down off an embankment.

Again, his father's enormous head crashed into the table. The glasses fell in a rain of glistening shards. His father's shapeless mouth opened to expose rough, broken teeth.

Dinosaurs used to walk the hills here, but it had been different then. Freddy thought about that a lot, how things used to be so different. And how they might be different again, with new monsters walking the barren land: giant rats and scavenging rabbits, but maybe rabbits like no one's ever seen before—long claws and hind legs strong enough to tear another animal apart. Just before the dinosaurs came, low-lying desert then, the early Jurassic Period. No animals. Great restless sand dunes towering seven hundred feet, snaking and drifting like primeval dreams. Fading, dying away in the distance.

The earliest home Freddy could remember was an old boarding house a few hundred yards from one of the early oil rigs. A white-washed shack,

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really, several crate-like rooms strung together. He and his father had shared one. He couldn't remember his mother, except as a gauzy presence, more like a ghost, something dead and not dead. He didn't think she had ever lived with them in the rooming house, but he couldn't be sure. It bothered him that he could remember so little about her—a hint of light, a smell, that was all. She had vanished. *She left us. She left me*, he corrected himself. His father had always told him that, but it was still hard to believe.

The land sank. An arctic sea reached in. Millions of years passed, and in the late Jurassic it all rose again. The dinosaurs were coming; the land was readying itself.

He sometimes wondered if he had ever known his mother at all. Maybe his memories were false. Maybe she had died when he was born. Maybe she'd gone away to die, her time done once she'd given him life.

The land just come from the sea was much more humid. Flat plains. Marshy. Great slow streams loaded with silt flowed out of the highlands to the west to feed the marshes and lakes. Dust floated down from the volcanoes beyond the highlands. Araucaria pines towered 150 feet above the forest floor, the tops of ginkgos, tree ferns and cycads below them. Giant bat-like pterosaurs flapped scaly wings against the sky, maintaining balance with their long, flat-tipped tails. Crocodiles sunned themselves by the marsh.

And yet he did remember his father complaining about her. How she never cleaned, never helped them at all. He held a mental image of his father throwing her out. Her screaming, crying, reaching. "I want my baby, my baby!" Freddy couldn't be sure.

Apatosaurus raises its great head above the plants. Forty tons, plant-eater. Cold eyes. Its head comes crashing.

Freddy loved a woman in Rangely. Because of her he allowed himself to stay overnight there on Fridays. But it scared him, loving someone like that. She might leave. She might vanish. And he didn't like waking up in Rangely; the first thing you saw were those barren white sandstone hills.

He loved her. He was sure of that. His love filled him, and formed one of the three anchors of his life, along with the memories of his father and the thoughts of dinosaurs. But lately something felt lacking. Some crisis, some drama. Loving her didn't feel like quite enough.

He wasn't sure why they'd never gotten married. The time had never seemed right for either of them, but after a time he realized that the time would never seem right. One time she was going to have his baby, but she miscarried. No one else had known about it. Wasn't time for it, he supposed; its time had passed. He didn't believe in God or heaven,

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but sometimes he wondered if the baby might *be* somewhere. Hiding from him. Or waiting for him.

It was the same all over. They had friends—lovers and married couples—and all of them seemed to be breaking up. Still loving each other, but unable to stay together.

Sometimes his drives from Meeker to Rangely were specifically to see Melinda, but he almost never thought about her during the trip. He thought about his father, and dinosaurs.

Freddy looked out the side window of the pickup. Sagebrush flats, rising sandstone buttes, creek beds turned to sand. Old wrecks out in the fields. Before the oil men there had been cowboys, a few farmers. Before them, the outlaws hiding out.

Before the outlaws, fur traders maneuvering through the canyons.

Before that, Indians trading along the Green and Yampa rivers.

Before that, dinosaurs roaming the hot, wet lowlands.

Freddy had watched his father slowly become obsolete, running out of things he could do, running out of places to live. The drinking had grown steadily worse, his father had gone from job to job, they had moved from shack to shack . . .

His father's great head, his enormous body falling, crashing into wood, Freddy scrambling to get out of the way of the rapidly descending bulk . . .

And then his father had left, vanished. Freddy had been seventeen. He had a vague memory of his father walking away, across the flat into dust-filled air. It had been early morning—Freddy had been trying to wake up, but couldn't quite manage it, and had fallen back into the covers. He'd been abandoned.

Freddy did minor legal work for one of the oil companies. Easy assignments, dealing with the local landowners on rights-of-way, leasing, sometimes the complaints of an especially disgruntled employee. Most of the time he sat behind his desk in Rangely reading a book, or daydreaming. In the office he had a full library on dinosaurs and other mysteriously vanished races and species. Many days he saw no one, and he ate his lunch at his desk.

Today was Friday, and he would be staying over at Melinda's place. Melinda taught school some distance from Rangely—rancher's kids, mostly—and Freddy often wondered why she didn't live closer to her work. But she said she liked Rangely.

Over the weekend they would be visiting her father's grave on Douglas Mountain. Her father had faded after a long, consuming illness. She'd been at his bed most of that time, waiting for him to leave her, but still not quite believing it when he finally abandoned her, his eyes going away into gray.

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Freddy felt a bit guilty, but he had to admit he looked forward to it. The wild horses they called "broomies" roamed Douglas Mountain, one of the last such herds in the west. A dry and rocky highland there, over 450 square miles. The herd had been there for more than a hundred years, beginning with horses which had wandered off from the farms and ranches and gone wild. They were beautiful to see, wild and alive. Melinda's father used to catch a few, work with them. Then he'd died.

Melinda's old Dodge was already at her house. Something was wrong; she usually came in an hour after him. He walked inside; she was standing at the old-fashioned sink, her back to him.

"They're closing the school," she said quietly, not bothering to turn around.

"Why?"

Now she turned, looking slightly surprised. "What do you mean *why*? It could have happened anytime; you know that. Enough of the ranchers have moved away . . . there aren't enough to support it now. One of the ranchers bought it; I hear he's going to turn it into a barn."

He felt stupid. "When is all this supposed to happen?"

"End of the term. Three weeks." She looked up at him. "I'll be moving away, Fred. I've spent too much time here; I've exhausted all the possibilities. I . . ." She looked at him sadly. "I can't get what I need here any more."

He couldn't meet her gaze. He walked around the kitchen slowly, looking at things. He knew it was a habit which infuriated her, but he couldn't seem to help it.

"I . . . don't want you to go," he said finally. Then he tried to look at her directly, to show that he really meant what he was saying. He couldn't quite manage it, but he thought he was at least close. Maybe she wouldn't perceive any difference. "Don't leave me," he said in her general direction. "I love you."

"I love you, too, Fred. I really do. But that isn't enough these days, is it?"

"It should be, but it isn't. I'm not sure why."

"I don't know either; things are changing. Everywhere."

He held her for a time, but he knew it was simply a gesture. A last, not-so-dramatic gesture for some kind of end.

They went to see her father's gravesite anyway. It was a rough haul over broken land, and try as he might Freddy found it impossible to think about Melinda, the loss of her. As much as he cared, he found himself again thinking of dinosaurs, imagining serpentine necks rising up over the hills. Again he recounted the ways they all might have died.

Some thought the mountain-forming upheavals at the close of Cretaceous time must have killed them off. But why weren't the other an-

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imals destroyed? A favorite theory used to be that disease, a series of plagues, wiped them out. Or racial old-age. Some people claimed it was the wrath of God.

The most popular theory held that they were exterminated because the world became a colder place, maybe when a giant meteorite struck the earth, the resultant dust cloud obscuring the sun.

But no theory seemed quite adequate to explain such a complete, world-wide extinction.

Perhaps they had known it was their time. Perhaps something within their bodies or within their reptilian, primeval dream had told them that their era had come to an end. They had had no choice but to accept. The others had left them behind. He imagined them going off somewhere to die, their great bodies piling up. And the world had gone on without them.

His father's massive head striking the floor, his great weight shaking little Freddy where he hid beneath the table. The large eyes rolling, the mouth loose and shapeless, groaning . . .

They went to her father's gravesite holding hands, not saying anything. Douglas Mountain was beautiful, the broken land made to seem purposeful, aesthetically pleasing in its shape by means of the fields of gray-green sage. There was no one to disturb them; this was real back country. Tooley-wads, the oldtimers called it.

The grave was well-kept; they had spent a good deal of time during their courtship on the mountain, and frequently they puttered around the grave and its monument. An old tree crooked its branches above the plain stone, and hanging from it were her dad's stirrups, lariat, a few of his leather-working tools, and a branding iron from his first job as a hand. Like a small museum. Artifacts already ancient-seeming and near-forgotten.

The wind picked up and lifted Melinda's sandy hair off her shoulders. "Sow coon," she whispered, and laughed softly. "Sow coon" was cowboy talk for a bad storm. Freddy thought he'd heard a horse, several, whinnying and pawing at the dirt behind them. He looked nervously around and saw nothing but a gray dustcloud spinning up with the breeze. His father used to say that the "signs" were always there if you just knew how to read them. Nature's secret messages. You could tell what was coming if you just knew what to look for. Freddy imagined his father out there in the dusk with the long lost horses, dinosaurs all, hiding, watching him.

"Where's the broomies?" he asked her.

"Here somewhere. They're a bit shy these days."

Freddy shivered and pulled closer to her. He looked back over his shoulder. A small column of the dust was settling, but for a moment had

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looked like a horse's leg, bending, then slamming into the dirt. He could hear fiery air being forced through large nostrils. Ghost sounds, he thought. Then all was silent again, the air cleared, and Freddy could see for miles around. No dust, no disturbance of the slopes or barren, windswept flats to be seen. No life.

"I think they're gone," he said to her, staring out over the bare slopes. "My God, I think they're all finally gone."

She looked up at him, but did not reply.

"Love won't save us," he said.

Again the enormous head crashed into unconsciousness.

Hours later, Freddy was ordering another beer, staring at the sleeping cowboy at the table next to him. He hadn't been inside a Rangely bar since his father had disappeared. He hadn't been drunk in years.

The bar was lit by a few yellow lights. Cowboys and oilworkers shifted in the dimness, each becoming the other, losing resolution. The darkness of the bar absorbed most of their vague individual shadows, but those Freddy could see seemed much too bulky. They shouted, almost howling, their mouths wide, cavernous, and it hurt his ears.

He found himself examining the tabletop. Ever more closely the more he drank. What he saw there, finally, scratched into the surface, seemed to be some sort of pictograph. Picture-writing. Kokopelli, the flute player. The Fremont Indians, what was it . . . A.D. 1000? Freddy glanced up into the shadows, trying to find someone who might have carved it. He thought he saw a face darker than the others, a painted face, but then the area seemed to soot over again, two cowboys moving into the space. He fingered the carving gently . . . old, worn. Down around the Cub Creek area Freddy had seen a number of them. As teenagers, he and some of the guys used to camp out there, shooting at the pictures. He felt hot shame now, just thinking about it, and even at the time he had felt as if he'd done something dirty. The Fremonts had gone away around A.D. 1150. Vanished into the hills. No one knew why.

"It was their time," he whispered to no one. "Their hearts weren't in it any more."

The shadows in the bar were moving, dancing up the walls. Horses thundering in the dark. Fremont Indians. The cowboys and oil workers seeming to dance with them. And behind them all, the awesome bulk of an ancient, thundering reptile, tilting, falling . . .

"Hey, boy, you look rode hard an' put away wet!" A tall cowboy was slapping Freddy on the back. He blinked, and looked at him. The cowboy grinned back. "Buy you a drink?"

"Sure, sure," Freddy said blearily. It was hard to keep the old fellow in focus.

The cowboy sat down. "Been huntin' coyote up on the White River,

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thought I'd come into town an' stay out with the dry cattle." Freddy stared at him blankly. "Have a night on the town, don't you know." The cowboy looked around. "Been up too long, I reckon. Last night I was sufferin' the mill tails o'hell, boy, drunk too much I 'aspect, and all the she stuff was just them old sisters . . . made me so swole had to pick a fight with one o' those riggers, just a youngun, put em down till he hauled out callin' me to the street. Beat 'em fine, rimfired the kid, but Lord! Stove up today!" He looked at Freddy and winked.

"You . . . trap coyotes? You can make a living doing that?"

"Middlin', for what she's worth," he said. "Hell, it's a life."

"A life . . ." Freddy said sadly, guzzling the beer. "Not much left . . ."

"Now that's a fact! Cobbled up way to live, but it was a livin'. After I'm gone won't nobody know what happened, won't nobody know how I lived!"

Freddy stared into the tobacco-stained teeth. The smile growing wider, expanding, growing lopsided, the rugged, enormous face falling, falling . . .

But it was Freddy's face falling, crashing into the wooden tabletop.

Freddy woke up on Monday with the sun burning his face. He rubbed his dry skin, afraid to open his eyes, certain someone had just dragged him out of the Rangely bar and left him lying in the desert. Then the ground seemed to soften a bit beneath him, he opened one eye, and found himself in his own bed in Meeker, with all his clothes on. "How . . ." he mumbled, then realized the old cowboy must have driven him home.

Freddy stumbled out of the bed and looked around the house, but the man was nowhere to be seen. Freddy's pickup was parked in the front yard. The cowboy must have hitched back into Rangely. Or gone out into the mountains or the prairie, back into hiding. Vanishing. Dying.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and rubbed his neck. The bedtable clock said two. Hardly worth going into work now, but he supposed he should. He didn't have any appointments today, so he doubted they had missed him.

The house seemed unusually quiet. A light breeze ruffled the curtains over the open window, and there were no sounds from outside. No car engines, no children playing. He felt vaguely agitated. A sudden ripple of anxiety washed over his upper body. The hair on the back of his neck prickled. Strange feeling.

His coal-black cat walked into the room. She stopped suddenly, turned her head, and stared at him. He saw her tensing, her back rising. She pinned him with her eyes, unmoving. He started to approach her, but she raced away with a sharp cry. Freddy couldn't understand it. It was almost as if she hadn't expected to see him.

The wind coming through the window seemed to rise, the temperature

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to drop, so that suddenly he was feeling sharp and cold gusts penetrating the room in an almost rhythmical pattern. He walked to the window to shut it, but stopped and stuck his head outside. The position was too awkward to see very much, but no matter how much he strained his head this way or that, he could see no one, hear no one. A few dogs moved quietly through the streets. Cars were parked, empty.

It took him only a few minutes to slap some water onto his face and get ready for work. He didn't bother with a shower. He slid into the pickup, started the engine, and pulled out onto Meeker's main street, waiting for the images of his father to come once again.

He stopped after two blocks. He got out of his truck.

Cars and trucks were parked awkwardly on both sides of the street, straddling alleys, parked in the wrong direction, pulled up on the curb, stopped too far out in the street. The engines had been turned off, the doors shut firmly, but it seemed as if the drivers hadn't really cared where they left them. Maybe it hadn't mattered where they had left them.

There was no one in sight. He walked around the main part of town; two dogs raced away when they saw him. The doors to the stores and cafes were wide open. Food still on the tables, but the grills and coffee pots had been turned off. Someone had left the radio on, but there was only static. On all channels. "Where are you hiding now?" he whispered softly.

Freddy ran out to the pickup and spun the wheels. He stopped, took a deep breath, then headed out toward Rangely.

Off in the distance, a tall figure in battered hat and faded jeans was walking toward the mountains.

"Hey! Hey!" Freddy shouted, but the figure did not turn.

The wheels took the curves on edge, the arroyos drew him, the washouts beckoned him. He flashed on his broken body, twisted under the wreck down in one of the deeper gulleys, but still he pressed down on the accelerator, spinning the steering wheel.

But the receding figure was always too far away, and the road did not lead there.

"Hey! Cowboy!" Freddy shouted.

The cowboy did not turn, but continued to go away, to vanish.

He passed other vehicles abandoned at the side of the road. He saw no one on the hillsides but an occasional rabbit.

For the first time he could remember, the image of his father did not come to him.

Miles later—he had not kept track of the time—he stopped just within the city limits of Rangely, unable to drive on. A cold wind filled the streets with dust. There were no lights in the buildings, even with the

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overcast skies. A door banged repeatedly. At the periphery of his vision he was aware of the oil wells pumping on, unattended, unwatched.

He would not go to her house only to find her gone. He would not look at her things, the relics left behind.

It was well past dark by the time Freddy reached the top of Douglas Mountain. He had seen no human beings along the way. He hadn't expected to.

Where did the dinosaurs go? the teacher asked again. Most of the standard answers were covered. The cute little girl in front of Freddy, the one he had such a desperate crush on, said that God had done it, and several in the class agreed. Freddy gave the answer about the plague of caterpillars. He liked caterpillars.

He stood above the old horsebreaker's grave. Her father's grave. She wouldn't have a grave. None of them would. There wouldn't be anyone left to bury them. But maybe there'd be a quarry full of bones, and whatever might be there in the times ahead would dig them up and arrange them in display cases and dioramas.

The metal relics in the tree clanged together in the high wind. It was dark below, but Freddy thought he could see shadows moving there. Reflections of himself, maybe, inverse shadows. He was sure he could hear the wild horses thundering, the Fremont Indians calling to them, the trappers, the outlaws—or maybe that was his father's face in the darkness? Maybe that's where he went . . . all those years . . .

"I'm really the most ignorant of dinosaurs," he whispered to the shadows. "We're already extinct, and here I am talking to the dark. Here I am, again the one they've left."

He crouched down and leaned forward, straining his eyes. Nothing.

"Don't leave me behind!" he shouted. "Don't *abandon* me!" He touched his head softly, then scratched at his cheeks. He had not heard an echo. "I love you . . ." he whispered, but he had lost the names.

The wind seemed to rise, colder, but then he knew it was a wind inside him, and he imagined it starting somewhere near the base of his spine, sweeping up over the intestines, the liver, the heart, picking up odd cells of flesh and bone as it went, taking old memories to the brain . . .

"Take me along," he whispered.

And he felt his head beginning to fall, as if from a great height. Pulling him somewhere. ●

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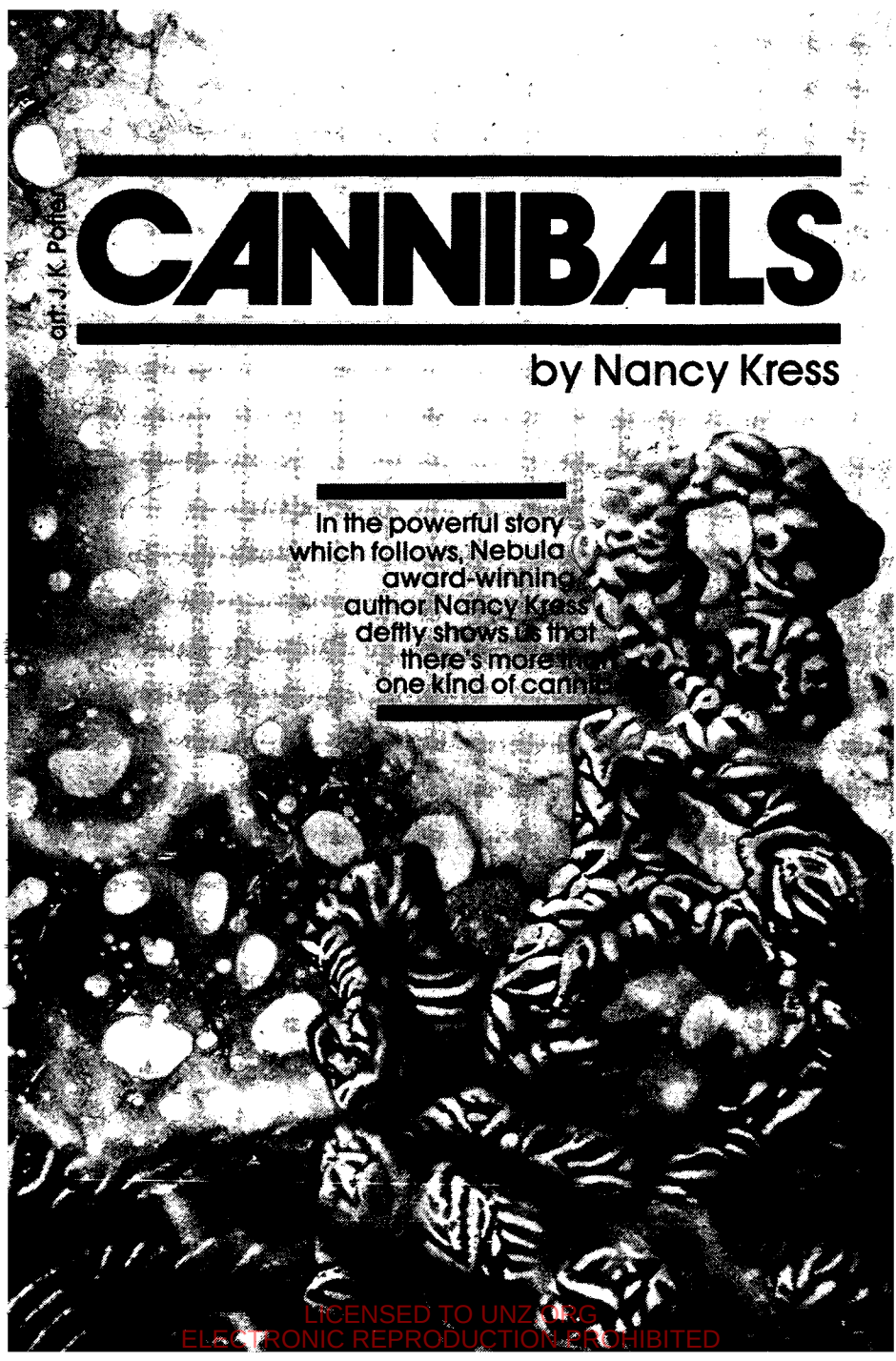
CANNIBALS

by Nancy Kress



In the powerful story which follows, Nebula award-winning author Nancy Kress deftly shows us that there's more than one kind of canni-

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The air was starting to close in on me again when Rachel and I met Ta-Nin on the path between the compound and the river. We had been having a desultory picnic at the water's edge, sitting on the dank spongy ground and talking through the filthy air, until I couldn't stand it any more and Rachel led us back. Ta-Nin came crashing along the path in the opposite direction. Her flat bare feet broke foliage and stumbled over rocks the way they all did, raising noise even in this spongy squat forest where noise didn't seem a possibility.

"Something's wrong," Rachel said. "Look at her, Jake."

I looked, but without knowing what I was supposed to be seeing. Planetside just a few months after two years in space, I was in that stage of acculturation where everything irritated: not just the air, which was a thick living soup of airborne spores and nonfungs and plant filaments, but the pulpy ground, the flaccid trees, the aliens themselves, too fat and too short and too unknown and too stupid. Everything.

Except Rachel Harbatu.

"Something must have happened," she said. Dropping to her knees beside Ta-Nin, Rachel talked with her in those rapid hacking coughs they called a language. I tried to figure out how she knew this was Ta-Nin and not another of the compound-tamed Sha. The alien, half my height, gazed at Rachel from dark, nearly circular eyes set in a face that seemed all gray jowl. A strip of hair the color of pale grease ran from the top of her head along her spine and down the backs of both short legs.

"She won't tell me what's wrong." Rachel frowned; my irritation increased. With the aliens she was always somehow a little different: more obvious, less the ironic and detached scientist I enjoyed taking to bed, more like the Kelvin colonists—that is not true. She was nothing like the colonists. But with the Sha she was different, and I didn't like it.

"She won't tell me," Rachel repeated. She rose to her feet; nonfungs dirtied her knees. "She just says nothing is wrong."

"Maybe nothing is."

"No. Look at her. They're such bad liars."

"Then why do they lie all the time?"

She threw me a cool look. The whole picnic had been like that: jumpy with things unsaid. Neither of us had mentioned her father. Or maybe it was only me that was jumpy. Rachel's cool look had no hurt in it; she never demanded that I share her interest in the Sha. She never demanded anything. I had known she would answer my question with that remote calm. It was why I had asked it.

Ta-Nin put her blobby four-fingered hand on Rachel's hip and pushed in a gesture even I could interpret. She wanted us to move along the path, back towards the river. Rachel shook her head.

"I can't be sure, but I think she—"

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Something screamed.

Rachel glanced at Ta-Nin and began to run, veering off the path at a 45 degree angle, plunging through the shoulder-high plants in the direction of the scream. It sounded again, a horrible animal shriek. Ta-Nin made an unintelligible noise and crashed after Rachel. I followed them both, easily passing Ta-Nin but catching Rachel—God, she was fast—only when she stopped at the lip of a sudden shallow depression ringed with rocks. She paused only a second, then leaped the rocks and seized what crawled on the spongy ground.

"Get that one there, Jake! Off her leg!"

But I couldn't. My knees gave way and my stomach rose. I had never seen it happen before.

The Sha female within the dell screamed again. Rachel seized the maggoty whiteness on her leg and pulled hard. I expected the grub to scream too, but then I saw the circle of suckers fastening it to the alien fat. Rachel yanked again, wrapping both her arms around the slimy, limbless body. The suckers did not come loose. Another of the things crawled from between the Sha's legs. Its head swayed, blind, and then it crept up its mother's side and its mouth closed on her warm belly.

Rachel's face never lost its expression of intense concentration. Kneeling beside the Sha, whose eyes had closed, she pried open the alien's mouth, forced her head to lean over her belly, and rammed two fingers down her throat. The Sha vomited over her child.

So did I.

When the last of the heaves had passed, I stumbled forward, too late to be of any use. But of course it had always been too late. The Sha had stopped struggling and lay with her eyes closed, head thrown back against the rim of the shallow dell. Her three offspring sucked at leg, belly, and chest. Smeared with vomit and slime, Rachel stood erect at the formless end of one of the grubs, staring down at them with her abstracted concentration.

Behind me, Ta-Nin wailed.

"Those things could have turned on you," I said, hours later. It took me hours to say it. If they had attacked Rachel, I would have been no help.

"They won't use human hosts," Rachel said. She stood in a short blue-green robe in front of my mirror, brushing her hair. I had pulled the standard utility lighting out of my quarters and put in old-fashioned lamps, heavy metal tubes ending in swells of glowing yellow. God knows that Kelvin, its one colony city stubbornly Basic Humanitarian, was already full enough of anachronisms without my anachronistic lamps. The colonists had chosen anachronism; the scientists in the compound

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were stuck with it, or leave. No light on Kelvin flowed into bio-enhanced vision, or bio-enhanced anything. I watched the compound personnel who entered my quarters catch sight of my lamps, glance at me warily, and pretend not to have noticed.

Or maybe I just liked the circles of yellow light overlapping on Rachel's skin.

She said, "Didn't I tell you the grubs won't feed on humans? I must have, Jake, at some point."

"I don't think so." I stretched out on the bed and watched her raise her arms to stick little red sparkly things in her hair.

"You probably weren't listening. The pheromones don't attract the offspring to human flesh. Wrong odor. We tried."

"You *tried*?"

"Under controlled circumstances."

"How the hell do you control circumstances like that?"

She turned her head and smiled at me. Light ricocheted off the red sparkles. I saw from the smile that she did not hold my squeamish failure of the afternoon against me—did not in fact hold it at all. Over and done. She was tough and clean as machinery, and nothing I did or did not do affected her much. I grinned and reached out to tug at the edge of her robe.

"Come on, how do you control circumstances like that?"

"You don't really care."

"Sure I do. I'm fascinated."

She laughed. "I'll tell you anyway. With the same elaborateness—stop that, Jake, the material will tear—with the same elaborateness you use to control tests on your life-support machinery."

"I don't test it. No, sir, ma'am—I just fix it. You got an air-lock broke? Which one, this—no, that's the storage bay? Sure looked like an air lock to me, a lowly engineer."

She laughed. But a second later her face grew abstracted again.

I said, "Is your team any closer? To an answer?"

"No."

"Not even the hard-working and estimable Lemke?"

Rachel grimaced. Her team second was an ass. "The enzyme just isn't there any more. We estimate that in nearly half the female population, the vomit shows not even a trace."

I pictured the controlled circumstances her team must have used to determine *that*, and let go of her robe.

"There's no logical answer," Rachel went on, almost to herself. Her hands still moved in her hair, fussing with it. Healthy, brown hair, masses of it. Despite myself, I looked away. "It can't be a spontaneous

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dominant mutation. Too dysfunctional. The Sha are literally consuming themselves. Self genocide."

"Cannibalism," I managed to say.

"Well—no. That usually results from a protein deficiency, or else some mystical nonsense. Besides, human patterns don't apply. These people are used to a non-sentient host for the grub stage of their children. Cannibalism is deliberate."

"So where was the non-sentient this afternoon? Its absence looked pretty deliberate to me."

"The Sha know there's no point any more. That woman today knew her vomit wouldn't counteract the suckers—she'd birthed before. But that time, her sisters had pulled her away in time. Ta-Nin told me."

"Woman." "People." "Children." And Rachel cautioned *me,* the mild xenophobe, not to think in human patterns. I said sourly, "Then why didn't her sisters pull her away this time?"

"They're all dead."

"Ta-Nin—"

"—is not her sister. It's a kinship thing. The only ones who are allowed to help with birthing are sisters or, in extreme cases, a male by whom one's sister has become pregnant." She frowned. "We think. It's still a little murky—informants give contradictory information."

"In other words, they lie like hell."

Rachel ignored that. "What bothers me more than all that is why the woman didn't even *try* to vomit until I forced her. There have been a few cases of spontaneous enzyme re-appearance, and she must know that. But she didn't even try."

I saw again the repulsive alien and her monstrous grubs, not trying. Rachel stopped fussing with her hair and came closer. "You all right, Jake?"

"Yes." I reached for her, sliding one hand under her robe. She gave me her cool smile.

"Yes? What are you trying to prove now?"

"That you're smart enough to see what I'm trying to prove now." Which was, of course, a lie. I had told her a lot in the few months, more than I should have, probably. But never about Cassie. Rachel could not know what I needed to prove.

She laughed. "We don't have time for proof."

"Sure we do."

"I have to be in the lab in twenty minutes."

"That's time."

"Maybe for you. Not for me." She kissed me lightly and reached for her clothes, which she had draped over my tool case. I hadn't noticed that before. I glanced away from the case—a stupid, reflexive gesture that

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immediately killed my mood. Rachel went on dressing, and I watched her, and the yellow light from another time lay over the room.

"Rachel—"

She half-turned towards me, her smile growing puzzled when she saw my face. What was I going to tell her? I didn't know; her name had just surfaced with that unexpected intensity, that involuntary suddenness I hated. My fists clenched at my sides.

"What is it, Jake?"

"Nothing."

She dropped whatever she was holding, reached for my right hand, and uncoiled my fingers. Her hair fell forward in a smooth brown river. I wanted to tell her not to look up, not to raise to me a face with any trace of question, or my arm would hit her.

Before I could say anything, someone pounded on the door, and I turned to open it.

"You witnessed another birth!" Lemke said. He pushed past me and rushed over to Rachel. She looked up and I saw that her face was as controlled and calm as ever, except for the allowable irritation of talking to Andrew Lemke.

Almost as short as the Sha, angular and brittle as corroded re-entry alloys, Lemke peered at his world from myopic eyes feverishly bright with envy. His world was Kelvin. Rachel told me he had been born to first-generation colonists, core-hot Basic Humanitarians, so convinced of the evolutionary wrongness of altering the human body that they had permitted their brilliant and misfit son neither eye implants nor the biogenetic altering that would have prevented his weak heart. Lemke had never been off Kelvin. He never would be. The transition from colony to compound had taken everything he had, consumed every skinny bitter tendon. He was Rachel's team second only because of Kelvin's stubborn refusal to allow on-planet any permanent scientist with significant biological engineering. There weren't many. Despite his education, Lemke was compound and not colony by default, and he knew it.

Once, by the river, I had seen him kick a Sha offspring, not a grub but a young maturant only days out of her safehouse. The Sha had crumpled, and Lemke had walked on.

"What happened at the birth? Tell me *everything*, Rachel."

"Nothing we haven't seen before." She sketched briefly the afternoon's events in the dell.

Lemke hit his open palm with the opposite fist, a ridiculous and theatrical show of frustration. "Didn't you have any enzyme with you?"

"I don't carry it on picnics," Rachel said calmly. "Do you?"

Lemke lowered his chin and looked at her; for a moment, his eyes

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glittered. It was impossible to picture him on anything as casual as a picnic. I said, "What enzyme?"

Rachel said, "An artificial synthesis of the enzyme the Sha have lost."

"You can do that?"

Lemke snorted, turning imperious with the machinery tech. "Of course we can do that, Razowski. A chemical formula is a chemical formula."

I spoke directly to Rachel. "Then why not just give the enzyme to the Sha? To use it when they birth?"

"They won't. We can synthesize chemicals to alter nearly any biological given, but we can't make them use it. At least, not so far, not even the few who communicate with the compound. It must touch on a taboo of some sort—we're not sure. The information is contradictory."

"Liars," Lemke said. "A Sha is a Sha." I had thought the same thing—but not with such native contempt.

"A colonist is a colonist," I murmured, too low for Rachel to catch it.

Lemke turned towards me with a peculiar slow swivel of his gaze that stopped just short of meeting my eyes and then turned slowly back. It was an eerie gesture, buried as the ponderous slide of tectonic plates under deep and muddy water.

Rachel said, "Ta-Nin tried to keep us away from the birth. The privacy thing. But she let me talk to her about it afterwards, and I explained about the synthetic enzyme. Again. But really, Andrew, that was all. Nothing to add to what we already knew."

Lemke went through his palm-smacking theatrics again. Rachel reached for her shoes, a fluid graceful gesture that parted her robe enough to flash white thigh. Lemke stopped grimacing and for a moment his face went still. Rachel didn't notice; she was pulling on her shoe. I suddenly wondered if there was any woman on Kelvin, colony or compound, who would not reject Andrew Lemke.

He said, his voice just slightly too shrill, "We're all looking forward to your father's performance tomorrow night."

She glanced at him and reached for her other shoe.

"It isn't often Kelvin gets a performance from somebody like Justin Harbatu."

Rachel pulled on her shoe. Lemke couldn't leave it alone.

"I hope he performs something from *Rage*. That's my favorite. I've seen it twice."

Rachel stood. Her face was calm as usual, smooth dark metal. *Rage* was based on the kidnapping and murder of her mother, when she was four years old. Rachel herself had been left alive by the same men. I strode past Lemke and opened the door.

"Out. Goodbye. We're busy."

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He scuttled out; maybe he even felt a little ashamed. I doubted it. When I turned back to Rachel, she was smiling and shaking her head.

"God. Lemke." She stripped off the robe and reached for her tunic.

Relief burned my eyes. No averted face, no suppressed tears, no sudden moody quiet to have to question or ignore. No hurt clutching, not even about something as painful as *Rage* must be for her. Or maybe it wasn't even painful any more; maybe her calm ran all the way through, the efficient cool energy of a solitary system.

Like Lemke, I couldn't leave it alone.

"Let's not go tomorrow night. To your father's show."

She fastened the front of her tunic. "We have to."

"No, we don't."

"Yes, we do. Or at least, I do. You can skip it if you want, Jake."

"You wouldn't mind going alone?"

"No. Why should I?"

Despising myself, I said, "Even if he does something from *Rage*?"

Rachel looked at me, level. "You can do what you want, Jake."

I saw that she meant it. No averted face, no suppressed tears. I put my arms around her and nuzzled her neck. Against my cheek, I could feel her mouth smile.

"No. I have to get to the lab. Stop that . . . later."

"Now."

"No. Later, Jake. I'll be back in a few hours and we'll laser the floor if you want. There's plenty of time."

A memory stirred in my head. *There's never any time.* I pushed it away and stood up, a little ashamed of myself. I had been setting Rachel up, yet another petty test—when would I stop doing that? But she had passed. No tears, no clutching. She was not Cassie.

"I love you," I said. But she was already out the door, and I knew she would not hear.

Cassie and I had spent nearly a year on Janos, as the advance team for the Corps: life-support engineer and reconnaissance biologist. Janos was empty. No artistic performances, no scientific compounds, no colonists, no aliens with three-stage life cycles. There was only volcanic fire and rock and plants and worms and microbes, all of it, in memory, in shades of blood. And my wife, restless enough to want to breathe a barely breathable atmosphere whose heat slicked her skin with constant sweat, gleaming and sweet.

On Janos, Cassie suddenly refused to cut her hair. It grew wild in thick black masses that curled in the heat and clung to the sides of her neck. She pushed it back with a quick impatient gesture, both hands. At first only whenever the hair fell forward. Then as habit. Then more and more,

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until she did it constantly—her slim darting hands scraping raw the sides of her face, over and over, out of control.

"Don't do that, Cassie. Stop it."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Hold me, Jake, hold me tighter . . . I'm afraid!"

"Of what, for Christ sake?"

"I don't know. I don't know!"

"Cassie . . ."

"You don't love me. Not when I'm like this."

"I love you."

"But not enough."

"No matter what I say to you, it's not enough!"

"That's not true. It's inside, the fear, it's always inside . . . don't get up! Don't go!"

"Damn it, I have work to do!"

"I know. I know. I'm sorry. There's never any time."

But that had been in the beginning, when we still thought it was just we two, machinery wizard and gene wizard, on Janos.

Cassie never succeeded in isolating the microbe, despite her formidable equipment and training. Much later, the Corps medical officer told me that wasn't surprising.

"These slow viruses aren't really viruses, aren't genes as we define them. Not even life as we define it—no nucleic acids, no permanent structure. We can't find a trace in her brain, even with a TOL scanner."

"Then how the hell are you so God damn sure it's there?"

He wouldn't look at me. He stood in the middle of his clean sick bay, surrounded by glassware that had not been hurled and walls that had not been pounded and furniture that had not been soaked with endless tears, and the son of a bitch would not look at me.

I shouted, "The drugs you give her aren't working! They don't calm her fears, they don't damp her emotions, they don't do anything!"

"I know. We don't understand what the alien virus does to brain transmitters. It's not chemical. We just don't understand."

"Damn it—"

"She can't help it, Razowski. What she does. Not any of it. The heightened emotionalism, all directed at one source . . . it's a part of the pattern. The most you can do is try to go on reassuring her."

"Try something else!"

"We can't. Anything else would kill her."

And I had said nothing, and the doctor had looked at me hard, because he had heard it anyway.

For months after Cassie finally died, I had had the same dream. She

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and I stood at the edge of a cliff that was both dream place of red carbon steel, and the Great Rift on Janos. Below us the cliff face sheered straight down, without shadows. Cassie's legs were severed at the knees. Her blood pooled on the steel ground.

"Help me, Jake!"

"I can't. I *can't*, any more!"

"Give me your legs."

"Cassie . . ."

"Give me your legs!"

And I did. Suddenly they were on her knees, and I lay with wriggling stumps at the edge of the red cliff. Cassie stood above me, her face momentarily calm. Into that shocking calm I spoke quietly, more quietly than I had spoken to my wife in that entire last tormented year.

"You're killing me, Cassie."

"I know," she said, and spat blood, and looked out over the empty Rift into a sky white and hard as bleached bone. "I know."

When she died, the alien virus died with her. The doctor handed me the suicide note. "She didn't want to take the chance of transmitting it to you. Even though there was no chance. She knew that, but . . ." He didn't finish.

I took the note. With my other hand I took from him my teragauss field sterilizer. Positioned at Cassie's head, it had created for a brief moment such an intense magnetic field that the atoms of her brain had let go, collapsing into slimy jelly punctured by fragments of clean bone. The instrument, its fist-sized case made of a duraplas immune to magnetism, felt cool and hard under my fingers. A strand of Cassie's black hair curved down from the handle, the shining tail of a comet already lost against the sun.

"I'm sorry," the doctor said.

"Yes," I said. The teragauss sterilizer had gone back in my tool case. I had gone into space, working freighters until after two years I came to Kelvin, whose tiny Basic Humanitarian colony thought it needed a life support engineer.

The shuttle skimmed over the thirteen klicks between the scientific compound and the one human "city" on Kelvin. Rachel chatted composedly with the rest of the over-dressed scientists, half of them watching her slyly for signs of drama; that was the half who had seen the holovid of *Rage*. I couldn't stand to look at them, so I held Rachel's hand and stared at the ground below.

There was nothing much to see except limp, shoulder-high trees mottled with the all-pervasive nonfungs, sliced by the freight road connecting the compound to the city. Whatever engineer had laid the road had

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known what he was doing. It was a good job, serviceable even after three generations of use. I watched it all the time I tried to figure out yet again why Justin Harbatu had chosen to perform on Kelvin.

It made no sense. Harbatu was an actor. Actors of his stature did not make unenhanced holovids, nor the public appearances at which they were filmed. Actors of his stature made either enhanced holovids or direct-interface brainies—both of which were of course illegal among Basic Humanitarians. Even the equipment for the simplest enhanced holovid—the audience brain-wave scanners, the feed-backs for scent and light and sub-audios—were illegal. What Harbatu was allowed to do on Kelvin was, essentially, to stand on a stage and talk, with pre-set music and pheromones behind him. That was it. Anything else was to rape the Basic Humanitarian skull, on the inside of which was engraved "The human mind supreme, untainted."

So why had he come?

There was Rachel, of course. But he had seen Rachel a few months ago, on the first loop of this tour, right after I met her. She hadn't been interested in seeing him then; she wasn't now.

"Someone should tell him," she had said, "that the mark of the minor artist is always strain."

"You tell him."

"He wouldn't believe me. He calls it something else." Rachel licked her fingers; we had been eating something sticky, something forgotten. She looked up at me and smiled. "He calls it passion."

I smiled, remembering; Rachel leaned towards my ear and whispered, "What could possibly be funny on this stupid shuttle?"

I shook my head and pointed at the Auditorium below.

It stood on a slight rise at the far end of the city. Someone had told me that it was the first non-essential building the original settlers had put up. I could believe it. The Basic Humanitarians had rejected a century of space-colony alloys and construction techniques in order to build a Terran Greek temple out of crumbly gray stone, complete with four columns and a frieze. Blue nonfungs mottled the columns and cancered over the stone, eating slowly clear down to the structural supports. Silhouetted against the filthy sky that diluted the light from three moons into watery urine, the Auditorium looked like an outhouse. I had never heard anywhere of original settlers who were not humorless romantics, but this was the far end of a bell-shaped curve. All by itself, the Auditorium went far towards explaining Andrew Lemke.

He was inside, prowling among the off-worlders who had come in on Harbatu's ship. Crew, colonists, and scientists milled in artificial camaraderie.

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"Christ," Rachel said, "there's Kleinstadt. The Governor. A black hole if there ever was one."

"He's coming this way. Shall I dent his Schwarzchild radius for you?"

"Behave yourself, Jake. He can throw us both off-planet."

I thought it was an odd thing for her to say; the scientific research on Kelvin was funded completely by the Corps, and the colonists could only interfere if the compound threatened their colonizing. Kleinstadt bore down on us, picking up Lemke on the way.

"Rachel, my dear," Kleinstadt boomed. "You must be so proud of being queen of a Justin Harbatu live performance."

"We've all waited so long to see this," Lemke purred.

Rachel's smile was iron. Kleinstadt prided himself on being more cosmopolitan than most Basic Humanitarians; it made him feel daring. Once he had even been off-planet. Years ago he had tried to marry a technician from the compound; she had declined. With his gray tunic he wore an orange necklace.

From across the room I saw someone I could actually have talked with: Jameson, the Security chief at the compound. He stood in rumpled, outdated dress robes, looking as if he wished he were somewhere else. But then he caught sight of Rachel, and I saw the hungry expression on his face a bare moment before it vanished. That was something I hadn't known.

"What is this new work Justin is going to perform?" Kleinstadt asked genially. I would have bet my hydrogen torch that Harbatu was unaware of having become "Justin." "Here I am set to introduce him and he won't tell me even the title until the last second. All he will say is that it was created since his ship stopped here on the first leg of his tour. But surely he would have told you!"

"Afraid not," Rachel said. "Shall we sit down?"

Just before we took our seats, I whispered to her, "We don't have to stay."

She didn't even answer me.

There was a long wait before the lights dimmed and Kleinstadt strode on stage. He looked pale. I saw him glance out over the audience, as if he were looking for someone—Rachel?—and for a disbelieving moment I thought he would announce that Harbatu would perform scenes from *Rage*. But he did not.

Kleinstadt cleared his throat. "We are privileged to present to you tonight the galactic premiere of a new . . . a new concert, created in the months since we were . . . privileged to have Justin Harbatu last visit Kelvin. I say 'privileged' advisedly, and with two meanings." He was sweating. "Privileged first because this work is the first Justin Harbatu has created to honor Basic Humanitarian principles: 'The human mind

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supreme, untainted.' Privileged second because this work is the first . . . the first human celebration of our cousins in life, the Sha."

All over the room, bodies drew rigid. Kleinstadt fumbled on.

"There exists on Kelvin that understanding, that brotherhood, great enough to let us appreciate our sentient brothers across the gulf that must exist between any two peoples alien to each other. That brotherhood is made the more precious, the more poignant, by the tragedy befalling our fellow sufferers in the universe—"

Like the politician he was, Kleinstadt had regained his sonorous tones. The colonists sat like stone. They had given their lives to what they thought it meant to be human; an honored outsider was now going to impose on them what it meant to be Sha. I saw two of the technicians from the compound exchange amused glances. Beside me, Rachel's thigh felt like stone.

"—fellow sufferers who face, as humanity once faced, the issue of their own self-destruction. Having triumphed over such a burden, having thrown it off, we can perhaps reach out to help our sentient brothers within the Humanitarian protection of our science. We can certainly reach out with our fellowship, and our tears. And so it is with incalculable gratitude that I welcome to Kelvin the one artist capable of that reaching out, as no other performer of our time could do. Justin Harbatu, performing his new concert: *Cannibals.*"

Harbatu walked out onto the stage.

Behind him, the opaquing dissolved and three Sha musicians began to play their weird, repetitive music on instruments of wood and bone. I had heard the music before—when all three moons were down I had heard it all one endless night—but I had never heard it in the presence of Kelvin's colonists. Nor of Justin Harbatu. Light came up behind him—there may have been scent too, I couldn't tell—and in the irregular spaces between the notes of Sha music Harbatu began to speak.

None of his holovid classics had captured the sheer personal presence of the man. It was more than the presence of the actor, more than the huge bulk and the famous eyes: glowing, startling green. Rumor said the eyes were alien implants; official counter-rumor said that was not possible. After thirty seconds, it didn't matter. After Kleinstadt, Harbatu looked real, alive, and through him came alive the Sha.

His words were not poetry, although that antiquated art gasped once again on Kelvin. His words were just that: words, the only possible words to give us the Sha and their lives, before: the soft yielding stalks of the forest, the village, the hearth. The air thick and cradling as blankets. The grubs in their safehouses, soft damp mounds of fur and plants in a ring around the hearth. A young maturant clinging to coarse fur. The children. The words to bridge how that felt to humans, felt to Sha.

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Only I wasn't feeling the words, I was feeling the Sha, and I was watching Harbatu hold his body still with some terrible control that he could not make extend to his eyes, and that was the measure of its terribleness.

He spoke of when it changed.

Against the thin tattered music, Harbatu's phrases rose and fell. He described what I had seen that afternoon, and I knew I had not seen it at all. Cannibals. I had seen the ugliness, the obscenity, and had wanted to slam it into extinction. What I had not seen was the woman, the children. What it meant to her as centuries of evolution failed and her own grubs closed their suckers on her living flesh.

Picture after picture pinned behind my eyes.

The musicians played, not understanding the human words, and finally I could not take my eyes from them. Their dark, circular eyes did not watch Harbatu, did not watch anything at all. Lost.

Then, abruptly, after so long in stillness, Harbatu's body shifted, a graceless jutting of pelvis, a wrench of shoulders. The lights changed, the music changed—I don't know how. It wasn't Sha music. I couldn't feel where it was coming from. The light opaqued the Sha musicians and did something else, something that hit like a blow. Harbatu's voice followed it harshly. The audience, amputated too quickly from the first movement, jerked. A woman in front of me whimpered.

Harbatu threw the words at us, in syncopated phrases contemptuous of the vulnerability he himself had created. The contempt was worse than any direct accusation: I was guilty without knowing of what, and I fell into the guilt as into a gravity well, the smash looming up at me from below. No one moved. There was no escape. Harbatu built it slowly. The child crawling from between the legs, and the vomit rising like despair, and the dark eyes watching as the mouths closed—

Harbatu was saying that the Sha cannibalism had come to Kelvin with the human settlers.

The woman in front of me gasped. A man half-rose in his seat and then sank back. Harbatu fixed his gaze on us out of that dangerous light and no one else moved—except Rachel.

It took me a moment to realize she was gone. Only that could have pulled me from the auditorium. I stumbled after her. Outside, I saw that my arms still flailed weakly. What was I fighting off?

Harbatu's voice.

I breathed deep. It hurt, as if the moonlight were acid being drawn into my lungs. As my head cleared it began to pound. Thought struggled through the pounding: *Harbatu used illegal subliminals.*

Rachel had strode to the bottom of the hill and stood leaning against the stone base of a statue of a colonist, its silly commemorative posturing

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mottled with the same blue nonfungs as the building. Her left hand gripped the stone hard enough to turn the knuckles white. She turned to face me.

"He had no right."

"Rachel, it didn't—it didn't happen that way. Did it?"

She hesitated, and in the space of that hesitation she seemed to physically flicker.

"No," Rachel said. "It didn't happen that way."

"Tell me."

She didn't answer. I gripped her by the shoulders. "*Tell me.*"

"The absence of the enzyme showed up before the original human team. That's to a .05 confidence level. The only doubt is because . . ." she shook her head to clear it, "because the equations have to allow for the Sha's having so little sense of time that it's hard to be sure about what they give us, and because there was the usual time lapse in learning the language. But that's not the point about the drivel he was wallowing in!"

I didn't see how that could not be the point. Rachel's eyes were enormous and curiously filmed—what kind of subliminals had Harbatu used? Pheromones, subaudios—the whole arsenal, somehow, of mind-benders just short of direct interface. I didn't see how else he could have sucked me into that much emotion. I writhed at the memory of sitting in that Auditorium.

Rachel was watching me closely. She slipped free from my grasp and closed her fingers on my arm, and I could feel grit from the statue between her palm and my skin.

"It's *not* the point. It's not. Don't you see what he did? This accusation against humans is no worse than the rest of it. He *exploits* it—all of it. That bleeding compassion for the tragedy of the Sha—what does he know of the tragedy of the Sha? He spent two weeks here once, and never learned enough Sha to give a ritual greeting. He feeds on it, swells himself with this 'horror' that never touched him personally, and then spews it back to us sodden with easy compassion."

I saw the musicians' eyes.

Rachel said, "He has no *right* to that suffering, not even artistically. It is not his. He hasn't earned it."

She turned her face away from me. Moonlight slid over her hair. I wanted to walk away, escape this, think straight somewhere else. This was not Rachel.

"Rachel, artists have always — "

"*No.* This is different. None of us have a right to this, the death of a whole race. It's *obscene,* Jake. Do you think he really did that to all those people without feedback equipment? It's there, somehow, somewhere, miniaturized—I don't know. How long since any of us have seen state-

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of-the-art equipment in this backwater? He may even have used illegal pheromones. You saw that audience, paralyzed—he wants that for the holovid. Reaction shots." Her face twisted into ugly ridges. " 'Look, look, world—see what Justin Harbatu can do to an audience even when they're Basic Humanitarians!' God—the cameras spent more time filming them than him, and in holo it will look . . . he manipulated our responses until they were as artificial as his emotion. He *fed* off us, as much as off the Sha!"

I had forgotten the cameras. What had my face shown?

Rachel raced on, the ridges on her face contorting into snaking lines. "His engineers will put together a performance that will break your heart. Then it will go out over the entire sector, billed as the first performance from a Basic Humanitarian colony, and two dozen worlds will file genocide protests with the Corps. They'll shut us down. They'll have to, from political pressure, no matter how the figures compare with the biological risk humans bring to *any* world we touch. Do you know what that risk is, Jake? Do you?"

I couldn't speak. Her intensity hammered behind my forehead; her eyes bored into me.

"Six percent. In six percent of the worlds we touch, we destroy something biological. Something major. Here we have a chance to save something, and he will stop us. He'll stop us because his transcendent art is worth more than just truth. Truth doesn't hold up to impassioned holovids, especially when they're created by *my father.*"

She said the two words softly, white hot. I stepped back.

"But not this time, Jake. Not like when . . . not this time. He's not going to destroy the Sha, or the work I've done here, either. Let him feed off somebody else's pain."

She had not let go of my arm. Her face leaned into mine and her breath scorched me. It smelled stale, as if she had been sleeping a long time. It was that, more than all the rest of it, that brought the panic rising along my spine and made me reach for the cruelest thing I could have said.

"I never saw the resemblance between you two before."

Rachel's eyes widened. She dropped my arm. For a moment her face broke up, went to pieces. Then it was her own again, controlled and smooth, and she strode away from me around the statue, towards the parked shuttle. I did not follow her. No look she wore now would wipe the image of that other face: relentless, fierce, passionate beyond all reason.

Not Harbatu's, although that was what Rachel thought I meant.

She left the moonlit path and the darkness devoured her.

* * *

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The next day, the water purification system malfunctioned; nearly simultaneously, everyone in the compound developed diarrhea. The malfunction was easy to find, harder to repair with the limited electronic and mechanical parts inventory. My immediate predecessor, like Andrew Lemke a colonist wanting to be something else, either had not known what he was doing, or had come to not care. The maintenance assistant I inherited from him was shitting his guts out. Overload on the sewage refiltering strained most of the generations-old life support system in one way or another, and I worked twenty-hour days for a week, much of it at the antiquated water purification plant by the river. Bioengineered filter bacteria would have solved the problem in a day.

I did not see Rachel. But information filtered through, floating to me in semi-broken particles, osmosis through the clean barrier of work.

Harbatu and his technical team were editing *Cannibals*, sequestered in the visitors' hotel. Kleinstadt had introduced a colony law banning concerts not previously viewed by a member of the Basic Humanitarian Council. Lemke had said outright that Harbatu had used illegal pheromones.

Had it been any other scientist, he might have been listened to.

Rachel had visited her father the day after his performance. A short visit, osmosis murmured. Behind closed doors, osmosis murmured. No shouting, osmosis murmured. Rachel left with a face as blank and cold as when she went in.

I bent closer over my valves and pipes and circuit boards.

When I looked up, Tà-Nin stood watching me. I glanced sharply over my shoulder—I had left the door open. Hadn't Rachel said something about lone Sha being unwilling to enter human buildings without their sisters? But here she was, bare huge feet splayed over the damp floor, blinking at me. I had seen no Sha since the concert.

"Hello," I said. Stupidly.

She answered with a burst of gibberish like rocks scraping together. I nodded, smiled, and pointed towards the door.

Ta-Nin scraped some more. I walked over and took her firmly by the elbow, steering her towards the door. To my surprise, she broke free—I had not thought her that strong—and planted herself firmly. Staring up from the level of my waist, she rubbed her flabby belly. I smelled the stale mildew of her skin, and looked down into the dark circular eyes.

"I don't have any food."

She tilted her head, looked at me stupidly, and went on rubbing her belly. I tried to pantomime "no food," shaking my head and pointing to my mouth and cupping empty hands and feeling a total idiot. She went on rubbing the drooping rolls of fat beneath her flat chest. Then I got it.

"You're pregnant."

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She tilted her head some more, and something moved in those dark eyes.

I dropped her elbow. Uncertain, she put a hand on my arm. It felt gritty, and I thought confusedly of the nonfungs on Rachel's palm, the blue grit from the decaying statue.

That Ta-Nin was here without her sisters could mean only that she had no sisters left. She had seen Rachel and me run to save a sisterless Sha, and somewhere in her dim alien mind she had lowered a barrier, or dissolved it, or shifted it. It was all right to ask me to help her survive her birthing. She did not want to die.

I pushed her hand away and snarled, "Rachel—ask Rachel!"

She tilted her head far enough to ruin her balance, tottered, righted herself. The thing moved behind her eyes. Around us, the stench of untreated Kelvin water festered on thick air.

"Rachel helped, remember? I'm the one who shit upwards. *Ask Rachel.*"

"She can't," Rachel said from the doorway. She wore her biochemist's smock over pale clothing. Against the dimness outside she was hard-edged white.

"She can't ask me because I'm female but haven't ever been pregnant. But she can ask you. A male."

Her voice was cool, rational, invulnerable. All that I had loved in her. I looked away and said, "Then why not ask a Sha male?"

"She probably has. She's probably asked males by whom her sisters became pregnant, which are the only ones she can—we think. But you know the ratio, Jake—only 5% of the Sha are male. They spend most of their lives screwing."

"What a life," I said, and heard my own callous strain. But Rachel, the old Rachel, only smiled.

"You're the first human male a Sha has asked to help her, at least as far as I know. She saw you at that other birth. Most Sha aren't able to combine abstract transfer of an experience with breaking a taboo. But Ta-Nin is an unusually intelligent alien."

The unusually intelligent alien was still rubbing her belly, tilting her head, staring with complete incomprehension.

Rachel said quietly, "Please help her, Jake. You won't have to touch Ta-Nin or the offspring. You can use the synthesized enzyme. You just pour it over an offspring's mouth and the maternal flesh will repel it."

"Will she permit that?"

"I don't know. She says yes, but I think she may just expect you to carry away the offspring. The enzyme is more reliable."

I didn't answer.

"You'll need to stay near Ta-Nin when her time comes, in a few weeks. Or rather, she'll stay near you. She can sleep—"

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"*Not* in my quarters."

"I wasn't going to say that. In my lab. She's been there enough to enter it more or less willingly. And there's that couch in my office, for you. I'll be in and out. I'd like to see the actual birth, although I won't distress Ta-Nin by letting her see me. By remote, I think."

That couch in my office. I'll be in and out. With another woman, I would have seen this as at least partly devious invitation to gloss over the night of her father's performance. But Rachel met my gaze steadily, without layers. If she wanted to talk about that night, she would say so. Not everything she did was driven by devious emotional need. She was not Cassie.

I said, "What about a host?"

"There are always jelkin in the animal lab, alive and just-dead. You can bring one in when Ta-Nin starts labor. Jelkin were traditional hosts for the Sha, before. The offspring will seize it greedily."

But that picture was too close to the day of the picnic. I said sharply, "Tell her to stop that!"

Rachel made a gesture, and Ta-Nin finally stopped fondling her flaccid belly. If Rachel wondered at my sharpness, the wonder did not show on her face. She had never remarked on my squeamishness, never asked why a life-support engineer could not tolerate smashed bodies. She began to talk to Ta-Nin, presumably explaining the plans for her birthing. Ta-Nin suddenly dropped to the floor and began rubbing her forehead against my left knee. I leaped backwards.

"Christ! Make her stop *that*!"

Rachel laughed. She shot more gibberish at Ta-Nin, who rose and looked from me to her. Rachel took the Sha's arm and firmly guided her to the door. It seemed to me for a second that as Rachel maneuvered the Sha, I could actually see purposefulness shimmer around her, a kind of steady, undistorted field. Maybe Ta-Nin felt it, too. Maybe it would calm her. If she rubbed my knee again, I would probably kick her, and knowing that bothered me. I didn't like the Sha, but I liked even less resembling Andrew Lemke.

"Jake. Would you like to have dinner together tonight?" Rachel's voice from the doorway was level.

I hesitated, and then hesitation—or something—turned my voice sharp.

"No, thanks. Not tonight."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"All right." Her tone did not change.

I bent over my pipes and valves, oddly reassured.

That night my Link buzzed, long after midnight. Someone had broken

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into Justin Harbatu's rooms at the visitors' hotel and stolen the holofilm of *Cannibals*.

Security called me not because the door lock had been tampered with, which would not have been my concern, but because it hadn't. Door and window E-monitors recorded nothing. Instead, the thief had simply come up through the floor with a tunable laser saw set to infra-red to avoid triggering the E-monitors with X-ray backscatter. The ragged hole in the floor, a few meters from Harbatu's bed, was matched by pitted burns on the ceiling; the laser saw had been ineptly wielded. All the laser saws in the compound were supposed to be under my jurisdiction.

Justin Harbatu sat on the bed, holding his head in both hands. The windows were flung open and a strong breeze blew through. Jameson stood in the middle of the room, looking as if something inside him had died.

"How could anyone get hold of a tunable laser, Razowski? Don't you keep them locked up? Or is this one off one of the ships at the port?"

"No, it's not off a ship. Yes, I keep the compound saws locked up. One is missing. I checked when you called."

"Missing from where?"

"My quarters. My personal tool case."

Our eyes met. Jameson was looking at me with a hatred I did not understand.

"The tool case has an E-lock?"

"Of course."

"Who had the code?"

"To the tool case, nobody. To my quarters, just Security and Rachel Harbatu."

Harbatu raised his head. His skin was gray. Even so, even not looking directly at him, I was hit again by his peculiar personal force, radiating from the strange green eyes. It filled the room like heat.

"My daughter? To *your* quarters?"

I looked at him then; his tone was an insult. Jameson said, "Could Dr. Harbatu have somehow gotten or deduced the code to your tool case?"

I thought then of Rachel's teasing voice, the two of us lying naked in my room: "When were you born, Jake? By how much am I robbing the nursery?" But I hadn't used my birth date for the tool case code; only amateurs did that. I had used the date of my fifth birthday, when my mother had given me my first tool kit. Miniature welder, calculator, saw, struts, pliers, scribe: miniature love. I had told Rachel about that birthday. It had, like so much else, come welling up after two years of silence, two years of celibacy.

God, the things I had told her.

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"Razowski," Jameson repeated with that same inexplicable anger, "could Dr. Harbatu have gotten access to your tool case?"

"Yes."

Harbatu's eyes bored into me. I said, "A laser saw is not completely silent, not on that synthetic. It would sizzle. Didn't you hear anything? Didn't the staff below hear anything? Christ, isn't there any security around here?"

Jameson snapped, "The visitors' hotel isn't exactly an E-max prison. Watch your tone, Razowski. The room below is a kitchen and nobody's in it at night. Mr. Harbatu was knocked out. A K-gas, we think, either in his room or shot through the floor after the first cut from the laser. He thinks he remembers hearing something. That stuff fuddles you."

That's why the windows were open, why Harbatu looked gray. A K-gas.

"Anyone in Animal Control would have K-gas," I said. "That's what it's for."

"A lot of people could have it," Jameson said; the stress on the second word sliced the air. I wanted to smash something, with an intensity that frightened me.

With heavy formality Jameson said, "Mr. Harbatu, I have to ask you if you want to file charges for the theft. Colony laws apply in the compound if anyone chooses to file a complaint that evokes them; otherwise, only Corps regulations apply. Do you wish to file charges?"

"Of course I do!"

"Are you sure? Was that the only copy of the holovid?"

It hadn't occurred to me that there might be another print. I jerked my gaze to Harbatu. He sat up straighter on the edge of the bed, his face clearer as the last of the K-gas wore off. He hesitated just a fraction, and in that hesitation I read not paternal affection but a lightning calculation.

"It doesn't matter if there is another print or not. If no, an irreplaceable work of art is lost. If yes, and I let that sway me, an irreplaceable principle of justice is lost. There's already been enough disregarding of justice on Kelvin. Justice is what *Cannibals* is all about. It's not an abstract to me, Mr. Jameson."

I said, "And neither is free publicity."

He didn't even glance at me. His gaze was locked on Jameson, whom I saw struggling to find some impact of his own to match Harbatu's, to keep himself from disappearing into that intense personal field.

"Then you file charges."

Harbatu stood, dwarfing us both. He burned—with impatience, with outrage, with pain, with exploitation—I could no longer tell.

"Yes. Arrest both *him* and my daughter."

Jameson looked like a man choking on rivets. "I won't arrest Razowski,

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Harbatu, and neither would the colony police. He doesn't know it, but he's covered. There was a security agent watching his quarters all night. He never left. And Dr. Harbatu is covered as well, at least as far as having committed the theft herself. Any evidence the colony wants to bring against her would only be circumstantial, based on motive but not opportunity. She was . . . was with me all night."

He didn't look at me; neither did Harbatu. Harbatu said something, but I didn't hear it. I was already out the door, leaving them both there behind me.

The strange thing was that after the first shock, I didn't really blame her.

I locked the door to my quarters, sat on the bed, and spread the contents of the tool case around me in a circle of yellow lamplight. Monocrystal steel scribe. Pliers: needle, bent nose, stubby, griplock, diagonal. Quantum spectrometer. Omnimeter. Hydrogen torch. And the teragauss field sterilizer, fist-sized, shaped like a stoppered jar. In the lamplight it shone softly. I unpacked everything.

The tool case lock showed that it had been opened at 15:06:24, not long after Rachel had followed Ta-Nin from the water purification plant. She had asked me to dinner first. I had refused, and only after that she had moved onto Jameson, a second cat's paw. She had not begged me, or cajoled, or cried. She had—by whatever lies—gotten Jameson to set a watch on my quarters, removing me from complicity in her fight to save her work on Kelvin. It was a clean, tough, and purposeful fight, and in a curious way, impersonal. I did not blame her.

Once, I had insisted on fucking Rachel in her lab, in the middle of the working day. She had smiled that ironic, mocking smile, and I knew nothing I could do would hurt her. We had screwed like animals. It was the only time I ever told her I loved her, and she had laughed and kissed me lightly, without answering.

I packed the tool case and reprogrammed the lock with a different code. I chose the date of Cassie's death on Janos. Harbatu would not say if there were another print of the holovid; my guess is that there was not. They liked that extra edge of intensity, Harbatu and Cassie. One print of the masterpiece. One cat's paw.

I wondered if the Sha, in the sane generations before their enzymatic genocide, had provided not one but two hosts for the hungry, sucker-edged mouths as they emerged.

Ta-Nin squatted beside the path outside my Quonset, watching as I re-set the lock. I had not seen her in days. She waddled up to me, smelling

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subtly different: a heavy, sweet-sick smell, like rotting flowers. Wordlessly, she handed me two stones.

I took them—what else? They were gray, irregular, featureless except for having been rubbed free of every trace of blue nonfung. Ta-Nin's dark alien eyes peered into mine. I shrugged ignorance; Ta-Nin went on peering. Finally I put the stones in my pocket and walked on towards the greenhouses. Ta-Nin followed, squatting just outside the doorway, a blurry image through the translucent synglass.

Was she going to begin labor—here? Now? From what Rachel had told me, it should not be for another week yet. Could the Sha time birth more accurately than humans? With Rachel arrested, was I still supposed to midwife for this blobby, doomed alien?

I went to work checking machinery that didn't need checking. No one came near me; Rachel's trial, with swift colony justice, was set for tomorrow. Time had been requested on the Corps sector Link. Had anyone told Ta-Nin? Would she have understood if they had?

Half an hour later, I opened the door. Ta-Nin was still there, rolls of gray fat over huge flat feet. Directly in front of the doorway were two more stones.

I slammed the door shut and led her to Rachel's lab.

When we entered the building, it fell silent. Technicians and scientists alike avoided my eyes. Ta-Nin at first hung back, then crowded close to me, smelling foul. I hunted up Lemke.

"Razowski—I've been looking all over for you!"

He couldn't have looked very hard; I was on-call with the Link. I grunted something. Lemke looked at me, then away, blinking rapidly.

"Has Ta-Nin been with you all morning?"

"Yeah."

Curiosity showed in his face for a moment, followed again by that rapid blinking. He looked over my left shoulder and moved around the edge of a lab table. The corner jutted sharp between us.

"This is all ridiculous, you know. Rachel's arrest. They're just making a show for Harbatu's sake, and he's got his crew *filming* it. All of it."

I said nothing. Suddenly Lemke looked at me directly, still blinking.

"The colonists are afraid, you know. They're afraid that if Harbatu's holovid gets out and the Corps forces us to leave, then it's possible the whole planet might be quarantined. To colonists as well as research."

I reached for the stones in my pocket.

"Of course she's innocent," Lemke rushed on, "but if they find her guilty of the theft and that's the only print—I have to be at the trial, of course. I'm the only one who could explain what her work here consists of. The only one. I'm the only one who could carry on with it if she can't, if she—"

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"If she what?"

"If she, well . . . if she can't." And he smiled.

The smile was involuntary: a sudden stretching of thin lips over sharp teeth. I saw Lemke's horror that the smile had happened at all. He fumbled to grip the jutting corner of the table. I threw the four stones down in front of him and said, "What are these?"

Lemke looked, not seeing them.

"I asked you what they are. She brought them to me, Ta-Nin, two at a time. These two first, then these two. What are they?"

Finally he seemed to see the stones. "When?"

"This morning. She was waiting outside my quarters. Then she put the other two outside the door at the greenhouse."

Lemke picked up the stones and fingered them. Professional blandness settled over him like smog. "We've only seen this a few times. The Sha are secretive, you know, and if we get too close, they lie. But see how all the nonfung has been ground off? These are ritual stones, a formal request for help to a sister's mate from a woman about to give birth, when her own sisters can't help. We think."

He frowned, a grotesque wrinkling of bony chin.

"She probably didn't know what other category to put you in." Suddenly his eyes gleamed with malicious pleasure. "This might mean she considers Rachel to be some sort of sister. A Corps research head . . . but maybe not. They're not very inventive, you know. At any rate, the stones mean that the Sha's very close to birth. Tonight maybe, or tomorrow night."

He looked at Ta-Nin. She turned clumsily in a circle and began to edge out of the room.

"Rachel is still confined to the city, of course. She told me the arrangements she made for you. To function as a *Sha male*." He grinned.

I shifted my weight against the table. Lemke said hastily, "There's a couch in Rachel's office. I know she thinks Ta-Nin will be willing to birth here in the lab, but I don't. I think once labor starts she'll revert to taboo and go on out to the forest alone. So the building will be locked. When the birth starts, she'll start walking in circles, over and over, and she'll probably wail to get out of the building. Her noise will wake you and you can take the vial of enzyme—it's here in this case, the only one on this shelf so you can't mistake it—and follow her. Buzz me first. And take a remote tracker so we can find you."

"All right," I said, to say something.

"Pour a third of the enzyme over each offspring as it emerges—Sha never have more than three. If Ta-Nin vomits on her own, don't worry. The enzyme doesn't have to be very concentrated to turn the offspring away. And she may not even try. In fact, she might not understand what

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we're trying to do here at all, despite what Rachel says. They're not very bright, you know. Despite Harbatu's sentimental grandstanding. They're just barely sentient."

"Then why do you want Rachel's credit for saving them?"

Lemke looked at me as if I were a dead fish. I shoved the table forward and left.

Outside, Ta-Nin handed me two more stones.

That night it rained. Even though I knew the gravity was .97 Terran, the rain seemed to fall slowly: great cold drops struggling through living smog, to reluctantly splatter on the spongy earth and be swallowed. There were no puddles on Kelvin.

The sparse gray fur on Ta-Nin's head and back matted, smelling worse than before. She lumbered slowly beside me, and it seemed that her belly had distended even more since that afternoon. I had found her squatting outside the power Till, outside the water purification plant, outside my quarters after a solitary dinner ordered in. Did she need to eat? I figured that if she did, she would.

At nearly midnight we set off for the lab, through the filthy rain.

As I had hoped, everyone had gone. I led Ta-Nin to Rachel's office, not letting her see me lock the building door behind us. She curled up under the table I had shoved at Lemke, which seemed odd—if Sha birth was supposed to be out in the open, wouldn't she try for as much open as the large room permitted? I didn't worry about it. Lemke's anxious insistence that I buzz him when labor started was so much crap; I didn't believe for a minute that the lab wasn't fully monitored by more than the Link.

Rachel's office, however, probably wasn't. She would have known, and wouldn't have stood for it. I offered Ta-Nin a blanket, which she ignored. I left it on the floor beside her, went into Rachel's office, and stretched out on the couch.

An hour later I woke up, disoriented. Beyond the office door the lab was pitch black, although I knew I had not turned off the lows. I groped for the switch, flooded the place with light, and scooted to Ta-Nin's table.

She blinked up at me. I said, stupidly, "Are you all right?"

She blinked again and turned away. The rotting-sweetness smell rose from her like smoke. I made my way back to the darkened office and lay down.

A few minutes later I heard her drag heavily from under the table and across the floor. All the lights went off.

I grinned at Lemke and his monitors.

Hours later I bolted awake, listening. Noise. Around me the darkness pressed like dreams. But there was no walking in circles, no wailing. I

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heard the noise again: the scrape of a table leg across the floor. Ta-Nin must be shifting clumsily in her sleep.

I wondered what Justin Harbatu could create from Sha dreams.

Kleinstadt's judicial chambers were more B.H. romanticism: synthetics molded to look like heavy dark wood, over-sized Link terminal with styling popular a generation ago, all needlessly bright memory chips visible behind permaplas. Schlock, but technically good quality schlock. Kelvinites jammed the seats, but they too gave me an unexpected feeling of quality, of a peculiar sort. Unexpectedly quiet, expectedly grim, they sat with a perverse dignity. If the Corps shut down the scientific compound, it would make little difference to them. If the Corps evacuated Kelvin, they would lose everything. Faced with this threat, however second-hand, to their homes, they sat stiffly and did not look at Harbatu, who on many worlds would already be dead. "The human mind supreme, untainted."

Or maybe they just wanted to look good for the camera.

"Mr. Harbatu," Governor Kleinstadt said, his jowly face stripped of all geniality, "your turn. Face the DataLink terminal, please. Statement."

"I came to Kelvin with an artistic purpose," Harbatu began quietly, "and found a humanitarian one. I am an artist. An artist's job is to make humanity look at itself, to show us things we sometimes might not want to see. An artist . . ."

The Governor let him go on being artistic for several minutes more. Harbatu had not chosen to dress as I thought he would. I thought he would wear the gaudy trappings of one of the sophisticated worlds Kelvin colonists would never see, underlining his position as an outsider from somewhere less parochial, more passionate about beauty and truth and wide-angle justice. A phoenix in the void. But instead he wore a plain gray tunic. He had pitched his famous voice a little higher than at his concert, however; the Link is usually set for the middle vocal ranges. He was a pro, all right. When had I become immune to him?

The moment I saw Rachel sitting beside Kleinstadt.

She didn't avoid my eyes. Steady, unflinching, she looked at me and nodded. The nod said there would be no self-tortured apologies for the laser saw, no passionate justifications for Jameson, no desperate appeals wrenching my guts into water. She trusted me to understand that she had been protecting her work, and if I did not, tough re-entry. Tough, and clean.

I nodded back.

Finally Harbatu began to actually recount what had happened the night the holovid disappeared.

"And you heard nothing?" the governor said.

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"Nothing identifiable."

"DataLink?"

The colony Link coded and cross-checked the testimony. "No questions," it said.

"Anyone else want to ask Mr. Harbatu anything?" the governor said. Evidently Kelvin had purchased the very loose Reform Legal Package.

"I do. But later," Jameson said. His face was as blank as Rachel's, but not as clean. He did not look at her.

"Well, I do *now*," the governor said. The air in the room, Kelvin-thick, jerked taut. "What made you think, Mr. Harbatu, that the Corps researchers had anything to do with starting the Sha illness?"

Harbatu's gaze traveled the room. I saw that he had expected this, just as he must have expected the colonists' hostility. Love of home planet versus reverence for life, all set among the B.H. simpletons who claimed exclusive right to such reverence. It would make a great vid.

"Is this relevant, governor, to the theft of my property?"

"If it's not, the Link will ignore it. *I* want to know."

"If you're asking, governor, whether I have hard statistical data, replicable and publishable—no, I do not. That is the function of the scientist, not the artist. The artist moves on the wave front ahead of the replicable. He *must* do that, if he is to have any value at all." Harbatu leaned forward, gripping the arms of his chair with both hands. In my mind's eye I saw Lemke, gripping the edge of a lab table. "To struggle to name what hasn't yet been named. To show us all the possibilities, for good and for ill—don't you see? Don't any of you *see*?"

He looked at us, pleading in the alien green eyes, and I suddenly saw the one thing I did not want to see: he was sincere. Not playing for the holovid. He believed what he was saying, and he believed it because it was, at least in some sense, true.

"Art shows us to ourselves, and until we look, we don't know what we are. Not fully. We don't see our own greatness, or our own guilt. The artist—from *Genesis* on—has taken on that burden of human guilt nobody else can yet bear to assume, in order to *make* it assumable. Socrates, Christ, Sakharov, Pollidena—the performing artist has held a mirror to our guilt. Art itself—"

But he had gone too far. The governor's face mottled. "The 'burden of guilt' in this case, Mr. Harbatu, is being charged not to you but to your daughter!"

Harbatu shifted his gaze to Rachel. I think it was the first time he had looked at her. His eyes filled, horribly, with tears. They did not fall, merely shimmered in a green film. The governor's face lost its high color, looked uncertain. Finally he looked away. No one moved. No one, it seemed could—except Rachel.

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She met that terrible nakedness for a long time before her gaze dropped. Only that. But I had seen, and recognized, and something in my chest that I had not known was still there, that I had thought long since smashed, stirred and clawed.

"That's all," the governor said, finally. "You're done, Mr. Harbatu. Security Chief Jameson, please. Face the DataLink, Mr. Jameson."

Rachel never raised her eyes again. Jameson testified, in a dry voice spare with words. I did. Lemke did, and Jameson's agent, and Harbatu's holovid engineer. The colony Link asked a few questions.

"All right," the governor said wearily. "DataLink, connection to SectorLink 710. Request *amicus curiae* brief from Code 654-3210A, British-American-SpaceBeta tradition, Reform Legal Package copyright Juno Corporation. Hear ye, hear ye. Court in recess."

We sat and waited. To call the Corps Link decision an *amicus curiae* brief was a judicial euphemism; Rachel was not a colonist but a Corps citizen, and the Reform Legal Package was accredited. The governor laboriously hand-wrote his legal opinion. Three and a half light years away, the SectorLink retrieved the testimony from megalight, coded it mathematically, cross-checked in the indicated tradition: thousands of precedents, millions of facts, dozens of events as recent as an hour ago from as distant as the edge of the spiral arm. The governor wrote with his left hand, the thumb criss-crossed with thick, whitened scar tissue.

The Link said, "CorpsLink *amicus curiae* brief received."

"Just a minute, just a minute." Kleinstadt scratched some more, read it over, handed his paper to the court clerk. The clerk held the two papers, one in each hand. When he swallowed, long tendons in his neck surfaced like ropy fish.

"Hear ye, hear ye. Basic Humanitarian judicial opinion is that the accused, Dr. Rachel Susan Harbatu, is not guilty of theft."

It had not been in doubt. No one moved.

"*Amicus curiae* CorpsLink judicial opinion is that the accused, Dr. Rachel Susan Harbatu, is not guilty of theft, due to lack of substantial evidence."

"A match," someone said just behind me. His voice curdled with disappointment. It was Lemke.

Harbatu rose. He walked over to Rachel and said, with infinite gentleness, "You did it."

She stood. He said in that same gentle voice, "I filed a Priority-A Alien Protection Violation with the Corps. Yesterday."

Everyone heard; faces clenched in anger. But still Rachel said nothing.

"Rachel. You had no right to take that chance with these beings' lives. No matter how statistically small a chance. The Corps should have been

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notified a decade ago. You had no *right* to feed your career on their extinction."

She spat in his face. Harbatu stood there a long moment after she had turned to walk away and I saw both their faces clearly, stacked one beside the other. Rachel kept on walking, and people sank back out of her way as if mowed down with a scythe.

Harbatu said clearly, his daughter's spittle still running down his face, "There is another print of the holovid."

She did not even look back over her shoulder.

I didn't remember walking outside the building. Lemke's hand closed on my shoulder, the fingers like sharp wire. "An Alien Protection Violation. He'll shut us down. All for . . ." His bony jaw quivered and I saw that he could not finish speaking; all I thought was how ridiculous he looked.

"I have to get back, Lemke. To Ta-Nin."

"Why bother? We'll never finish the work now. Not before the Corps acts on that . . . that . . ."

His fingernails felt too much like Rachel's, the night of the performance. I shook him off. "And if it hadn't been for Rachel, Harbatu wouldn't be here at all. Isn't that what you're thinking?"

Lemke's eyes glittered, and then his face went blank, as completely empty as if somewhere in his mind circuits had switched off. I thought that if the Corps shut down the research compound, the scientists would leave—but not Lemke. Physically and emotionally unfit for anywhere but the colony he hated, he would remain on Kelvin until he died.

"Everyone on the research team is of course concerned about Dr. Harbatu," Lemke said with such tinny pomposity that I nearly brayed. Lemke's face stayed deadly blank.

I didn't take the shuttle from the City back to the compound. I should have, because of Ta-Nin, but I thought of the whispered speculation, heads averted from me: *Who had taken the holovid? For whom? Jameson* . . . and I walked the ten klicks, on the road laid down by the original engineer. Strange plants I hadn't seen before, that must not grow near the compound, edged the hard duraperm. One was reddish-brown, thick and wavy, almost like human hair. Twice a vehicle passed overhead, and once on the road itself. Each time, I stepped off the road and deep into the alien forest, crouching down among the flaccid shoulder-high plants until they met over my head, the thick blue-mottled leaves closing over me like water.

Ta-Nin waited outside my quarters. When she handed me two more stones, I could see their imprint pressed into the fat of her palm.

By the time I took her to the lab, it was again silent and dark. Had

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there been even one light, I think I would have turned us both back. Maybe not; shambling heavy beside me, Ta-Nin smelled even worse than last night, but this time I knew what the smell was. It was fear. I didn't know what she had thought during the hours we had all been gone to the City, nor who had been with her in the hours since. Rachel? Lemke? No one? She seemed different, somehow: something in the dark alien eyes. She might have thought we had all abandoned her. She might have thought anything.

I went into Rachel's office only to take the stoppered vial from its rack, and did not look at the couch.

Ta-Nin crawled under her table and lay down. I turned off all the lights and sat under the switch, the small of my back resting against the wall. The last thing I thought was *I won't sleep*, before I did. Machinery chugged in and out of my dreams, the kind of machinery that has not existed for three hundred years: pistons thumping with hot steam, fans pumping coolant, gears turning with teeth sharp enough to bite bone.

Then I was awake, in the darkness, knowing somehow that Ta-Nin was gone.

"Ta-Nin!"

She was nowhere in the lab, nor in Rachel's office. I thought of all the places she could be in the unlocked portions of the rest of the building, all the dark crannies large enough for a panicked alien about to give birth to children who would eat her. In Animal Control, I scanned the pens; none of the jelkin seemed to be gone, but I couldn't be sure. Racing through the corridors, turning on lights as I ran, I called out again and again. No answer. When the first grub turned on her, would she scream? Would that be too late?

"Taaaaaaa-Niiiiiin!"

She had *asked* for my help; why would she go away without it? Lemke had said she would revert to ritual, go to the open woods. He had also said that Sha were stupid, barely sentient, whereas Rachel thought otherwise . . .

I moved down the corridor to the building's outside door.

The door, which I had left carefully locked, stood wide open. I punched up the record of the last opening. It was half an hour ago. From the inside.

Ta-Nin is an unusually intelligent alien.

Things shifted in my mind, great subterranean re-alignments like tectonic plates. A Sha who could learn to punch in an E-code . . . how much harder would it be to learn to use a laser saw? To use it clumsily, ineptly, the tuning already set and locked in, just enough to burn a hole in a synthetic flooring. For a synthetic sister, who was going to save your life.

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Stumbling over my own feet, I ran back to the lab. The stoppered flask, which I had left beside me under the light switch, was gone.

Outside, it had rained again. The spongy ground held no footprints, but I thought I knew where Ta-Nin would go. The shallow dell where she had seen one taboo broken lay to the north. But if she went there, why without me, after all those mute appeals for my help? And if she went there without a host . . .

I started to run, but stopped a little way from the building and turned to re-trace my steps. This time I punched up the building lock record for the last six hours. Five minutes before the last unlocking the door had been opened from the outside, and then closed. A generic code opened the door from the inside; from the outside, the codes were individualized. This was the only one I would recognize; I had used it myself. It was Rachel's.

Undoubtedly a visual monitor covered this door, but only Security would have access to that record. Rachel would know that. Had she come to check on Ta-Nin, closed the door behind her, opened it, and left with Ta-Nin five minutes later? But Ta-Nin would not accept Rachel's help with her birthing. Only a sister's mate would be acceptable as midwife. *We think.*

I stood in the filthy air, thick as damp smoke, staring at the lock record. When someone moved up behind me, I didn't hear movement before voice, and I jerked as if I'd been shot.

"Razowski. What are you doing?" Lemke.

He stopped two meters from me and I thought, crazily in the midst of all the other craziness, *out of arm's reach.*

"Ta-Nin is gone. With Rachel, I think."

"Rachel? No, she can't be. At least not with Rachel. I just spoke with her on the Link. I called to see if there was anything I could do. About Harbatu's protest to the Corps. About the research."

"You just spoke to Rachel? In her quarters?"

"Just a few minutes ago."

Rachel's quarters were much farther from mine than were Lemke's. I stared at him stupidly. In the light spilling from the open lab door, sweat gleamed on his bony face like thick ointment.

I pushed past him and began to run, covering the short distance from the lab to the edge of the compound, then along the path to the river. I couldn't find the place where Rachel and I had left the path and crashed through the squat forest. I thought I had passed it when I heard Ta-Nin wail, and immediately afterwards a piercing shriek of agony. Human.

Even with moonlight, I couldn't find the dell. Thrashing through the plants, gritty leaves whipping against my face until they filled my mouth, I couldn't find the dell. Then the human shrieking rose again and the

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ground gave way under my feet and I was sliding down the rock-strewn side of the depression where Ta-Nin lay. Sharp pain stabbed through my right elbow.

The third grub had just emerged from between her spread legs. It crawled blind in the thick night, open mouth swaying at the sky. I heard what I had been too nauseous to hear the first time: its thin wailing, nearly lost under Ta-Nin's cry of pain and that other, agonized shrieking.

The thing crept towards its mother's flesh. Ta-Nin, visibly gathering all her strength, raised Rachel's vial and splashed the last of the clear liquid over its mouth. The offspring wailed again, swayed, and turned away from her. It thrashed a moment, then changed direction and sank its mouth onto what had been Justin Harbatu's face.

He still moved. With my left hand I grabbed the grub's other end and pulled. The suckers did not loosen. I tore at the thing with both hands; it flailed horribly but did not let go. My own voice sounded in my ears as I pulled and pulled and the thing stretched until finally it tore. The other two still fed on Harbatu, one on belly and one on thigh. The one fastened on his belly crawled beside a pointed rock, sticky with blood and hair from Harbatu's skull.

By the time I fell backward with half of Ta-Nin's child slimy in my hands, only she and the other two offspring still moved.

People came crashing through the forest. Lemke, others. There was shouting, unintelligible yelling. Pain coursed through my arm. Above her two living children, Ta-Nin watched me from exhausted, unfathomable eyes.

"He was looking for Rachel," Jameson said. His face was as gray as Harbatu's had once been from K-gas. We sat in Security the next morning, me sprawled across my chair, Jameson sitting in his as if bound to it. We did not look at each other.

"He had called me first, and I told him I didn't know where she was. Then he called Lemke. All the calls show in the Link. Lemke says he told Harbatu that he didn't know where Rachel was either. Lemke called Rachel after that, to ask about the research. By then she was home. She says she went to your quarters—witnesses saw her. She wanted to make sure you were at the lab with Ta-Nin, without actually going to the lab herself."

Jameson stared at a blank wall. His whole office was blank, the cubicle of a man giving nothing away. I said carefully, "Who opened the lab building door from the outside?"

"Harbatu. It's on visual. He used Rachel's code; she must have given it to him, on his previous visit to Kelvin."

"Does she say so?"

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"She says she can't remember."

The lock codes were in simple sequence. By seniority. I didn't mention this; neither did Jameson. He moved doggedly on, his voice a straight hard road.

"Harbatu was still looking for Rachel. He closed the door, went to the lab, must have found Ta-Nin. You were asleep. She must have led him out and to the woods, since only she would know where that same dell was. Rachel must also have given her father the generic code to unlock the door from the inside. It's a simple one."

Sprawled in my chair, I gazed at the gray ceiling.

"Ta-Nin just picked the rock from the ring of them surrounding the birth place; you can see the shallow imprint in the ground where the pointed end had once been driven in. She says . . ." Jameson stopped, looked away. I waited.

"She says Harbatu was going to hurt Rachel and make her go away. The researchers who speak Sha have been at her for hours, all the time she was pulling out her fur to make those damn safehouses. She tells one of them one thing, another one another thing. But that stays constant: Harbatu was going to hurt Rachel and make her go away. And then the Sha would go on dying forever."

I thought of an alien mind catching at the misshapen particles which drifted through the membrane of language. Seeing the jagged shards, the broken edges, but not knowing how they had once fitted together—if they ever had. Did Ta-Nin know that Harbatu was Rachel's father? What would it have meant if she had? How had she twisted whatever she thought she was being told over the last weeks by the researchers who talked to her?

Or perhaps no twisting had been necessary.

Jameson said, "The Corps wouldn't even have to be called in, except for—alien customs have Corps protection, especially for a low-sentient endangered species. If it weren't for the accident about which vial you took from Rachel's office, if you hadn't got the one that didn't just turn the grubs away from the mother but also actually attracted them to . . . to . . ." He didn't finish.

"Accident," I say, for the sound of it.

"Yes. That's what Kleinstadt says. He would be the one to start anything legal, if he thought there was a reason."

I said nothing.

After a while, Jameson repeated, "Accident. Rachel says—" He stopped, heaved himself to his feet, and looked away from me. I would never hear what Rachel had said. When Jameson moved to the Link, it was with the overly careful fumblings of a man carrying something large, and

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heavy, and too costly to let out of his sight for even an instant, ever again.

That was my last conversation on Kelvin. Jameson had witnessed what I had to say to the Link, in case it should, sometime, be wanted. By someone.

I thought of what I did not say to the Link. I did not say: On six percent of the worlds we touch, we destroy something biological. I did not say: sometimes the biological destruction flows the other way. I did not say: Cassie once had thick black hair.

Afterwards, Jameson himself drove me to the port. Neither of us mentioned Rachel again. Under Jameson's hands the shuttle throttle shimmied lightly side to side, and I was careful to not notice.

When the *SOMERSET II* leaves tomorrow, I leave with her. It's the ship Harbatu would have taken, but if Jameson thought of that, neither of us named it, among the other things unnamed. "Harbatu made this call, Rachel made that call, Lemke that other call." None of it important, none of it real. What was real was all conjecture, moving on the wave front ahead of the replicable.

Rachel's voice, saying: "We can synthesize chemicals to alter nearly any biological given."

Lemke's voice, not quite saying: "If it hadn't been for Rachel, Harbatu wouldn't be here at all."

Ta-Nin, coming to me just before I closed my quarters, to put into my good hand a stick woven with yellowed leaves. Her two offspring were not with her. I lay the stick on the floor and did not touch it again, nor did I ask anyone what it meant. Thank-you note, murder threat, curse for infanticide, request to stand godfather.

My last days on Kelvin, Rachel never tried to see me.

Waiting for the *SOMERSET II*, lying in my small stifling room at the spaceport, I see Rachel's face. The room is dark, but even if I turn on the too-harsh utilitarian light, I still see her face. Harbatu's should be there, too, covered with spittle and stacked side by side with hers the way they were in Kleinstadt's chambers, but I don't see it. Only hers. One is enough.

I'm leaving Kelvin not because I think Rachel instructed Ta-Nin to kill her father, but because I think she did not.

This may not be what Jameson thinks. If he is protecting her, he may think she used Ta-Nin that way. I am not sure what Jameson thinks. Unlike Harbatu, I will not lay claim to another's self-destruction.

Lemke talked to Harbatu that night; Lemke had had more time after the trial to talk to Ta-Nin; Lemke spoke the language. He had been suckled on it. The words of need turned rage were his native tongue.

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Since Rachel's resignation, he has become the head of biological research on Kelvin. Today he announced to Corps DataLinks, hungry for news of Justin Harbatu's spectacular death, that the scientific compound on Kelvin has just had a major breakthrough. He says the Sha biochemistry is the victim of a slow virus. He says they are close to isolating it. He says the Corps cannot interrupt this vital work now, even though research results on slow viruses are so hard to replicate by another scientific team. By the time you're sure you've infected the subject, its life support circumstances have so often changed.

On the Sector worlds, Lemke will—at least for a time—be The Man Who Saved The Sha. Just as Justin Harbatu will be The Artist Who Died Witnessing Their Agony. The second holovid of Harbatu's last concert plays to the entire Sector next week, a breathlessly anticipated performance of a great visionary assuming a guilt no one else could, as yet, bear to assume.

Including Rachel. What I saw burning in her eyes when she spat at her father was not guilt, and not murder. Not even hatred. It was something else.

The last thing Cassie ever said to me, just before I aimed the teragauss sterilizer at her head, was *We won't ever escape each other, Jake. No matter what I put you through. Never. Sometimes I think I was never alive until you were here.*

The *SOMERSET II* plans space runs for over a year. Quick orbits, lots of loading and unloading, docking machinery and life-support systems under constant use. And there are other ships. I can stay in space as long as I choose.

There are no cannibals in the void. ●

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TRACKING THROUGH THE MUTANT RAIN FOREST

In the twilit ceibas above our camp,
here on the edge of the mutant rain forest,
a neon toucan cycles light;
it blends with other birds that blink like
constellations in the forest canopy.

Genna points to a log mossy with
lapis bees duelling lime ants.
The foxfire toads glow like golden fungi
while a row of wood mushrooms mimics them
in turn, poisoning one for its nutrients.

Even some of the cloud pools, ringing
us like the footprints of the monster
we track, are not what they seem—
tiny tongues of quicksilver lapping
at the profusion of growth and decay.

Further up the emerald mountain, Jorgé has
found a freshly slaughtered jaguar already
veined over with a netting of blood-root.
Our quarry may still be far ahead, reminds Genna.
I shrug and stir our bubbling pot of maté.

At night in our tents we listen,
sweating and burning as with fever,
to the jungle toss and turn.
Genna whispers, how, how can we find him?
Sleep presses on us like a weight.

In dreams, I know that Genna is right;
a vision sputters like a volcano in my head.
Far ahead, wreathed in ethereal light,
a path winds into a lost horizon where only
new creatures—of a new bestiary—may follow.

At dawn Genna stirs and rubs against me.
I hold her, drowsy and disoriented.
From high on the mist-shrouded mountain,
an unearthly cry rises like a breeze
and fades with the last dregs of night.

—Robert Frazier

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ON BOOKS by Baird Searles

Greek To You

Soldier of the Mist
By Gene Wolfe
Tor, $15.95

Another historical fantasy from a major writer . . . the trend continues. Science fiction and fantasy seem to be looking more and more backwards rather than forwards or sideways these days.

Gene Wolfe's *Soldier of the Mist* (he wrote the *very* popular "Book of the New Sun" series) takes place in Greece just after the decisive battle of the Persian Wars (Plataea, 479 B.C.). The protagonist is a young soldier, Latro, who has fought against the Greeks. Suffering from a head wound, his memory lasts only the span of a day. This is the journal he keeps to remind himself day to day what has happened to him. And quite a bit happens to him. Caught up in the complicated intrigues of the Greek states, he travels from Thebes to Athens to Sparta to Ionian Sestos. On his part, he is searching for his identity and his country—he has (almost) no idea where he comes from.

Latro, probably because of his wound (we don't know for sure), sees that which others don't, primarily the gods, major and minor, that are mixing in the affairs of men. These include his own, since it is said by an oracle that his cure is involved with the Great Mother, whom he meets in more than a few aspects. There is also a werewolf, a revivified corpse, and several ghosts, among them that of Odysseus. These are not Latro's delusions, since that which he sees often has an effect on his surroundings or those he is with.

Many readers are going to have a problem with *Soldier of the Mist* because of the nomenclature. Wolfe almost never uses the familar names of gods, places, or peoples. The gods (and goddesses) are called by attributive nicknames (as current usage would have "the Virgin" for Mary), and placenames are words presumably related to the name in ancient Greece. You are given several clues in the foreword (Athens is "Thought," Corinth is "Tower Hill," Attica is "the Long Coast"); after that you're on your own. It requires some little knowledge of ancient Greece to determine that "the Kid" is Dionysius, "the Lady of Cymbals" is Cybele, "Tieup" is Piraeus (the port of Athens), and "Rope," which figures large in the story, is Sparta, the "Rope Makers" are Spartans and

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the "slaves of the Rope Makers" are the Helots. A little easier is "the Hot Gates" (Thermopylae), and "Riverland" (Egypt) is a snap once you've figured out it's not a place in Greece.

Presumably readers who neither know nor care that much about ancient Greece can breeze through simply on the story line. Those with a good deal of knowledge will solve Wolfe's little puzzles, and feel very clever for doing so. The in-betweens, however, may find themselves spending so much time checking references that they lose track of the story. The glossary at the end is not that much help, being for the most part in the author's frame of reference only.

Like the component "novels" of the "Book of the New Sun," *Soldier of the Mist* is so obviously only part of a whole ("the first book of a major work" says the dust jacket) that any considered judgment will have to wait until it's finished. It ends as abruptly as the New Sun books did, and Latro is left still countryless, though some broad clues help to demystify the reader as to that matter, at least.

Don't Sit On The Alien

Xorandor

By Christine Brooke-Rose

Carcanet, $15.95

"What in hell is going on?" is the bemused reaction of the reader after several pages of Christine Brooke-Rose's *Xorandor*. Stick around—it's well worth finding out.

What's going on at that point is a narrative told by two smart-ass teenagers—twins— interrupting each other into a word-processor *cum* verbal transcriber. Their story is rendered—quite literally; there's no point adding an adjective—their story is indeed rendered, in the sense of fragmented, by their dual stream of consciousness and their horrendous personal slang, half scientific jargon with computerese trimmings, half intellectual shorthand. One is reminded in one way of the heroine of David Palmer's *Emergence*, in another of Heinlein's insufferable Podkayne. Don't think that because these are kids, that this is a juvie. These are sophisticated young hellions, well aware, for instance, of the affair their scientist father had been having with his assistant.

As usual with this kind of narrative, when well done, you soon get the hang of their ravings. The story that emerges is a winner. They live in Cornwall; their father is supposedly supervising geothermal research in an abandoned tin mine. In reality, it's research into nuclear waste disposal. The kids, who go nowhere without their pocket computer, have been hanging out at an ancient carn (cairn). One day, a message appears on their computer screen—"Get off my back"—and then suddenly one of the larger stones (on which they are sitting) around the cairn says "Please, don't, sit, on, me."

To make a long story short (which the twins don't), they have discovered a silicon-based form of life,

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whose mental functioning is computer-analogous. The results are legion. They notify their father, and there's none of this kids-making-it-up business; *he* notifies *his* superiors. (Much of the story is in the form of transcribed audio tapes, the results of the twins' illicit eavesdropping.) Then Xorandor, as they call it, reveals that it has offspring, and that the whole family lives happily on nuclear waste materials (which solves daddy's problem as to the missing quantities he's been worrying about).

This is one many-faceted novel. It is hilarious as the kids try teaching the literal-minded Xorandor how to communicate on human terms. It is suspenseful as when one of the offspring, "drunk" from the wrong kind of nuclear waste, gets into a nuclear power plant and threatens to blow the whole thing sky-high, while quoting reams of Shakespeare which it has learned from the BBC.

There is intrigue—the mysterious "Belgian" who turns out to be a low-level German spy who steals two of the junior Xorandors for the Soviets. And mysteries: are the silicon beings from Mars, as Xorandor implies, connected to the SNCs, the possible Martian meteorites found on Earth? The twins, adept at reading Xorandor's oblique logicality, suspect that it is being deliberately misleading on that score. And why did it speak to them in the first place? And then it's discovered that the aliens can defuse atomic warheads . . .

The computer crowd will love *Xorandor* because of the alien's (natural) kinship to artificial intelligence and the interplay between the two, but don't be put off by that if you're not part of the computer culture. Because of its style, wit, and intelligence, *Xorandor* is definitely award material on anybody's turf, and is reportedly being considered for a major one in Britain. Search it out.

Darkling Daughter

The Darkling Hills
By Lori Martin
NAL, $15.95

What is there about the word "darkling" that is a turnoff? How do you darkle, anyhow? Whatever, however, I started Lori Martin's *The Darkling Hills* with that built-in prejudice, and things weren't helped by the immediate introduction of a heroine named Dalleena, a name not even an Edgar Rice Burroughs female would have put up with.

However, things began to look up after that. *The Darkling Hills* is that rare bird in SF and fantasy, a love story. Love in the genres, of course, is not a neglected quantity, but usually it is a side dish, as it were, something thrown in to make sure we know that the hero and heroine are human. In *The Darkling Hills* it is the central theme of the novel, so get out your handkerchiefs, because it's a tragic affair.

Indeed, it sounds pretty soppy when encapsulated. The aforemen-

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tioned Dalleena is a "relas" (princess and heiress to the throne) of the rather idyllic kingdom of Lindahne, and she is also a devotee of Nialia, goddess of fate, which means she's given to prophetic visions and such like. The gods of Lindahne are pretty active, albeit invisible, working through signs, portents, and their followers. Of the five biggies, the next most important to Nialia is Armas, god of strength. The worst thing that can happen is for a sworn devotee of Nialia to—er—consort with a sworn devotee of Armas, but when Dalleena meets the handsome blond Rendell, an Armasii, well—one guess as to what happens.

This circumstance hasn't occurred for millennia, because the offspring of such a union is traditionally an insane monster that will, at the very least, bring an end to civilization.

The intrigue gets pretty heavy as rival factions at court get wind of what's happening, and use it for their own ends, and then the neighboring Mendales invade and conquer the country.

Despite what it sounds like, *The Darkling Hills* is good stuff, mainly due to the author's ability. The artificial plot and obviously set up background are more than redeemed by the writing skill; Martin tells her story *very* smoothly indeed, and her characters are likable and human. The reader gets caught up in the dilemmas and intrigues despite him/herself, and by the time the expecting Dalleena is being chased through the wintry woods with the bloodhounds snapping . . . well, not quite, but it actually comes off by some miracle.

Another issue, however: it's probably unfair to load a good book with a complaint that applies to almost everything else that's being published these days, but it's just because the book *is* good that I'll bring it up here. I'm afraid I must add my voice to the growing number complaining of sequels, trilogies, and series. Nowhere on this volume does it say "Vol. I of the X Saga" (or whatever), but as I neared the end of the novel, and the pregnancy pregnant with potential continued, I was uneasily aware that there was no way the author could finish this up in one book. Sure enough, the results of Dalleena and Rendell's guilty passion are (there's a clue in that verb) left to grow up and fulfill the prophecies in another volume. Dammit, just give me a story I can get to the end of in one. Some few, of course, are epic enough to need multiple volumes (May's "Saga of Pliocene Exile," for instance), but all too often publishers simply go for the potential profit of a multivolume work. But judging from the readers I talk to (and I talk to a lot), there's a reaction setting in.

Hello Ms Chips

Seven Worlds
By Mary Caraker
Signet, $2.95 (paper)

The front cover of Mary Caraker's *Seven Worlds* trumpets

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"Morgan Farraday, a woman pitted against the most perilous planet in the galaxy!" The back cover matches that with "Morgan Farraday—Space Corps Agent . . . The Space Corps—the arm of the Space Exploratory Forces sent in to establish better communications with aliens on world after world—was an elite corps of tough, courageous men and women. And Morgan Farraday was the bravest and most clever of them all."

Now this superwoman isn't a future Modesty Blaise; she's not even a future Nancy Reagan. She's the interstellar equivalent of a primary school teacher, and if you're put off by that, you're the sort of reader the cover blurbs were written to—er—put on the wrong track, shall we say? Teachers can be as interesting as CIA agents.

In fact, Morgan Farraday is sent by the Space Corps (the *teaching* arm of SEF [see paraphrase above]) to educate the children of aliens, when requested. This obviously can lead to all sorts of complications. The teaching method of the pleasure planet of Midia, for instance, is plain old pleasure/pain conditioning, and the results are a population of seducer/hustlers. There are the vampire types of Roga who *love* violent epics like *Beowulf*, for all the wrong reasons. And then there's Parth, where the solution to getting information into the kiddy's heads is making mud pies.

Teacher Farraday's various adventures (rather lamely tied together to make a "novel") are classic SF puzzle stories where the keys to problems with aliens have to be figured out by the smart protagonist in the face of doltish bureaucrats. Caraker is a neat writer, no frills but clear and succinct (rare quality, these days, succinctness), and *Seven Worlds* is a good combination of adventure, puzzle-solving, and planet-hopping.

Ice Mage

The Anvil of Ice
By Michael Scott Rohan
Morrow, $16.95

It's an interval in the Ice Age, and there are the usual saber-toothed tigers, mammoths, and Neandertals decorating the set. But you'll have to look sharp to recognize them in Michael Scott Rohan's *The Anvil of Ice*, because they are just components in a full-fledged high fantasy that's surprisingly original in setting and a good deal else, too.

As in Robert E. Howard's mythos, Rohan speculates a magical world of prehistory, rife with gods and sorcery. But there the resemblance ends; the novel's depth, delicacy, and beauty owe a lot more to the other great fantasist of this century (clue—a major place name in his work is Rohan).

Here the gods are mysterious figures—Tapiau, the great forest; Niarad, the ocean; the Odinesque wanderer, Raven; and particularly the Ice, towering in the North and striving to come back and wipe out humanity, aided by strange forces,

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races, and renegade sorcerers. The novel's hero, Alv, is (of course) a foundling, adopted by a Mastersmith, and showing all the talents for being greater than his Master. This is not a matter of shoeing horses; metalsmithing and magic are one, and the great sorcerers are Magesmiths.

Tricked by his Master into creating a mighty weapon of unimaginable power, Alv flees the Mage's Northern tower near the mighty glaciers and realizes that he must create a counterforce. In his wanderings, he runs into fell foes and unexpected friends, such as the not-quite-human *duergar*, the "Elder" race, a short, beetle-browed folk expert in smithery, who, in fact, had taught the art to the *nouveau* race of humans.

Rohan is particularly good at evoking mysterious forces never confronted head on, but just glimpsed, as it were, out of the corner of the eye. His dialogue is also worth noting—modern in feel and ease without being anachronistic. The novel reaches a rousing climax in the siege of a great city, where Alv confronts his ex-Master (who turns out, no surprise, to be an ally of the Ice) with aid from the comrades he's gathered and the strange counter-weapon he has made.

But who is Alv, really? From whence come his great talents, still not quite mastered? Will he find his lost love, Kara, last seen flying east in the shape of a swan? What of the mysterious arch-sorceress, Louhi, barely encountered but obviously of great importance? Tune in to the next two volumes of "The Winter of the World" trilogy to find out. Grump, grump (see above *re* series). Will I *want* to find out after X number of months/years? This one I just might.

Automagic Shift

Talking Man

By Terry Bisson
Arbor House, $14.95

In what pigeonhole do you put a book that is half automotive mechanics, half magic?

That's not the only indefinable thing about Terry Bisson's *Talking Man*, but it will do for a start. Talking Man is a magician from the end of time (or the beginning), who "dreams the dream that is the world." His sister/lover/other, Dgene, finds him gone and pursues him through time.

Talking Man has settled down in contemporary Kentucky, married a would-be country and Western singer, and had a daughter. His wife has died, and Talking Man makes a vague living with an auto parts junkyard and repair shop; at times he uses magic to help out, but only when his daughter Crystal (now sixteen) isn't looking. Nevertheless, she has a good idea of what's going on.

When Dgene arrives in a white car that looks something like a Dodge, or a Ford, or a Chevy, and starts shooting things up, Talking Man takes off, pursued by Dgene; the two are followed by Crystal and William Williams, a college drop-

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out who has come in to get his Mustang fixed, and more or less been pulled into the action. The chase careers across Midwestern America, a Midwest that grows stranger and stranger. Williams is vaguely aware that the candy bars' names are different, and that the Mississippi River shouldn't flow north, shouldn't be at the bottom of a three-thousand foot canyon, shouldn't be crossed by only one jerry-built pontoon bridge which lies under the remains of a giant suspension bridge which has collapsed.

This sounds just cute or whimsical, but it's a good deal more than that. Bisson has dumped magic into non-urban modern America, a world of Clark bars, Conway Twitty, Burley Belt hats, classic juke joints with names like The Night Owl with Missile Command games beside the the jukebox, and the constant iconography of car makes and models. What make of car is being driven (or passed) seems almost as important as the characters' names.

Bisson writes about all this with brilliance and poetry (I know, I know, that word is death), and combines it with magic into a peculiar mix that gets perilously close to surrealism (for a fantasy). But the speed of the plot (the ongoing chase) carries you along anyhow, and the images stay with you. I'll not soon forget the fishermen who live on the two-mile-long Mississippi bridge hauling in whale-sized catfish. And even a nonmember of the automotive society like myself starts paying attention to whether it's a Chevy or a GMC pickup being driven.

But I never did find out what a "dog corner windshield" was.

Shoptalk

News of one of the year's more unlikely publishing events comes from England. There's a new hardcover consisting of Michael Moorcock's letters to J. G. Ballard. The major subject is not, as you might think, science fiction; no, nor fantasy nor even the art of writing. They are mostly about, of all things, Los Angeles, written from there a few years back when MM was in the Angelic City working on the script for a movie called *Return to Camelot* (fret not that you didn't see it; it never got made). The book is called, logically enough (particularly for the many-titled Moorcock), *Letters From Hollywood*; one can only hope that some daft American publisher will pick it up. Moorcock on LA should be worth reading.

Another oddly flavored anthology has come down the pike, worth noting if only for the originality of its theme. This one is called *Hitler Victorious*, edited by Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg, "Eleven stories of the German victory in World War II" (by Brin, Spinrad, Bear, Budrys, and Benford, among others), guaranteed to appeal to the historically masochistic (Garland Pub., $19.95) . . . Fred Saberhagen is following

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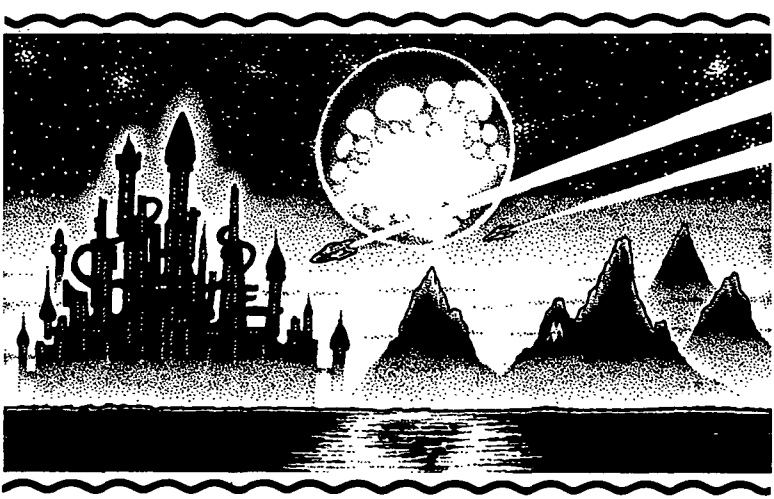
up his popular Swords trilogy with a new one, beginning with *The First Book of Lost Swords: Woundhealer's Story* (Tor, $14.95) . . . That splendid writer of short stories, Angela Carter, has a new collection. (You'll remember that strange and wonderful movie, *The Company of Wolves*, was based on one of her stories.) It's *Saints and Strangers* (Viking, $13.95).

In the years that I've been doing this column, the notice that received the most response was that on the Oz books that appeared last year. This proves either that there are a lot of Oz fans out there, or that if there aren't that many, they tend to communicate their enthusiasm more than most subgenrists. In any case, this makes it necessary to note that three more of the long "lost" Oz books by Ruth Plumly Thompson have been reprinted. They are *Ojo In Oz*, *The Wishing Horse of Oz*, and *Speedy In Oz* (Del Rey, $6.95 each, paper) . . . The third of Richard Cowper's "Bird of Kinship Saga" has finally appeared in paperback, after a long, long wait due to various publishing problems. Its title is *A Tapestry of Time* (Pocket Books, $2.95, paper). The earlier two books in this excellent and offbeat series are *The Road To Corlay* and *A Dream of Kinship*. They have both been recently reprinted.

The many readers who felt they'd discovered something special when they read R. A. MacAvoy's *Tea With the Black Dragon* will probably find that author's *Twisting the Rope* just their cup of orange pekoe. It's a sequel (Bantam $3.50, paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014. ●



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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

Spring Break is a big time for on-campus con(vention)s. Check next issue early for later cons (subscribe!). Plan now for social weekends with your favoite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, & a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (address, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 4271 Duke St. #D-10, Alexandria VA 22304. The hot line is (703) 823-3117. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Early evening's a good time to phone cons (most are home numbers) (be polite). Send an SASE when writing cons. Look for me behind a Filthy Pierre badge, making music.

MARCH, 1987

26–29—**NorwesCon's AlternaCon.** For info, write: **Box 24207, Seattle WA 94701.** Or call: **(206) 723-2101 or 789-0599** (10 am to 10 pm, not collect). Con will be held in: Seattle WA (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: O. S. Card, editor David Hartwell, artist Dan Reeder, fans M. & R. Cantor. At SeaTac Hyatt. Limited to 1400 (vs. 3000 at Norwescon '86) due to hotel problems.

27–29—**Halcon. (902) 465-2611.** Halifax NS. Medieval fight demonstration. No hotel at press time.

27–29—**Nova. (313) 334-4191.** Rochester MI. Tim Zahn, Hugo-winner Geo. (Lan's Lantern) Lascowski.

27–29—**ICon. (516) 246-3673.** Stony Brook NY. On SUNY campus. David Brin, Colin (Dr. Who) Baker.

27–29—**StellarCon.** Greensboro NC. On UNC-G campus. L. Niven, O. S. Card, A. Wold, T. L. Hickman.

27–29—**CoastCon.** Biloxi MS. At the Mississippi Gulf Coast Coliseum. L. Sprague (Conan) de Camp.

27–29—**Magnum Opus Con. (912) 781-6110 or (404) 324-2559.** Columbus GA. At the Iron Works, Ramada & Holiday Inn. Alan Dean Foster, Star Trek stars, comics artists. Gaming & comics emphasis.

28—**AprilCon. (212) 280-3611.** New York NY. Ferris Booth Hall, Columbia U. Postponed from November.

APRIL, 1987

2–5—**AggieCon. (409) 845-1515.** College Station TX. On A & M campus. Ben Bova, artist R. Morrill.

3–5—**GeneriCon.** Troy NY. At Rensselaer Union. Joan D. ("Snow Queen") Vinge, artist Dawn Wilson.

4—**Star Expo.** Irvine CA. On UC Irvine campus. "How Science and SF Affect Our Lives." Speakers TBA.

17–19—**MiniCon, Box 8297, Lake Stn., Minneapolis MN 55408.** Bloomington MN. D. Brin. At Radisson.

17–19—**BaltiCon, Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203.** Zelazny, Whelan, Doherty, Whitley. Big (2000-3000).

AUGUST, 1987

27–Sep. 2—**Conspiracy, 23 Kensington Ct., Hempstead NY 11550.** In UK. WorldCon. Lessing, Bester.

SEPTEMBER, 1987

5–8—**CactusCon, Box 27201, Tempe AZ 85282. Phoenix AZ.** The 1987 NASFiC. $40 advance, $50 at door.

SEPTEMBER, 1988

1–5—**NoLaCon II, Box 8010, New Orleans LA 70182. (504) 821-2362.** Costs $50 to 6/30, then $60.

AUGUST, 1989

31–Sep. 4—**Noreascon 3, Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** Boston MA. WorldCon. $50 to 9/7.

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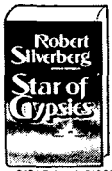

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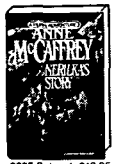

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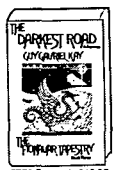

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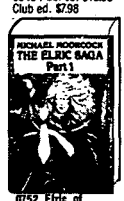

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